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FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

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A SERIES OF DISCOURSES
PREACHED IN ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, EVERTON;

BY
THE REV. R. P. BUDDICOM, M.A. F.A.S.
MINISTER OF THAT CHURCH, AND LATE FELLOW
OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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SERMON XXI.

THE SIN AND CONSEQUENCES OF IMPATIENCE.

GENESIS XVI. 1, 2.

NOW SARAI, ABRAM'S WIFE, BARE HIM NO CHILDREN: AND SHE HAD AN HANDMAID, AN EGYPTIAN, WHOSE NAME WAS HAGAR: AND SARAI SAID UNTO ABRAM, BEHOLD NOW THE LORD HATH RESTRAINED ME FROM BEARING: I PRAY THEE GO IN UNTO MY MAID: IT MAY BE, THAT I MAY OBTAIN CHILDREN BY HER. AND ABRAM HEARKENED TO THE VOICE OF SARAI.

THE Holiness of God's moral government is often wonderfully associated with a sovereignty of mercy, exhibited in testifying that where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound. Rahab the harlot, is not only spared from the utter ruin of Jericho, but made a mother in Israel, and an ancestress of the promised Seed and Saviour. Abram and Sarai his wife are led to act inconsistently with their holy profession: but while they are justly, though tenderly

rebuked of God, Hagar the other party in this fault, hath an especial revelation of mercy vouchsafed unto her. The mighty race descended from her has been through many centuries, and still remains, one of the most amazing evidences of the truth of the divine word, to which doubters may be referred for conviction, and believers for edification on their most holy faith. From the unadvised transaction recorded in the chapter under review, the Holy Ghost moreover draws, by St. Paul, a typical resemblance of the Law and the Gospel, of the heavy bondage of the one, and the glorious liberty of the other, under the figures of Hagar and Sarai, Ishmael, and Isaac. (Gal. iv.) This spiritual symbol will occur to be noticed, as we proceed in the patriarch's history. At present, the literal events will furnish ample matter for consideration. May the Holy Spirit make it useful and profitable! The whole transaction embraces three points of consideration.

I. The fault committed.

II. The consequences produced by it.

III. The especial dealing of God with Hagar.

I. The subtlety, not less than the malignity of Satan, is remarkably exhibited in the method

of his assaults, both against those whom he still holds in his awful bondage, and those whom the interference of divine mercy, and the hand of an Almighty Saviour have delivered from being his eternal spoil and prey. To the latter he is especially dangerous, by transforming himself into an angel of light; and seducing them into sin, under pretence of advancing the purposes and promises of God in their behalf. He thus prevailed against Rebekah, most sinfully to anticipate the assurance, that Jacob should have the birthright and blessing instead of Esau; and brought guilt, sorrow, shame, danger upon herself and the son of her mistaken love. He thus prevailed also against Sarai, and even against her more established husband, by inducing them to lay their feeble hands, and erring counsels towards perfecting the movements of the Most High: as if God were a man that He should lie, and the Son of man that He should repent: as if the purposes of an eternal mind, and an unsearchable wisdom, needed to be eked out by human contrivances; or as if Infinite power could not give effect to those intentions which were conceived in the heart of God, and which his own assurance had engaged Him to perform. Abram was still childless,

and far advanced in years. Sarai was now herself aged; and, as she (looking only through the dark and distorting medium of sense,) imagined, hopelessly barren. True it was, that again and again both had been assured by Him in whom both believed, not only for the literal promise, but for its spiritual fulfilment, by the incarnation of God for the world's salvation, that Abram should have a son. But as the promise had never yet plainly undertaken that Sarai should be the mother of this child, her wily enemy set her upon a device of very crooked policy, which issued, (as all perversions of holy simplicity ever must issue) in sin and unhappiness.

Female slaves were invariably the property of the mistress in any family. The husband had no right whatever over them. Hagar thus belonged wholly to Sarai, her person, labour, children, were exclusively in her mistress' hand. Sarai therefore, now despairing of being herself a mother, gave her handmaid to be the wife, or rather the concubine, of Abram: thus hoping that she should have an interest, if not immediately maternal, yet much more direct and absolute, than that of mere adoption, in any son whom Hagar might bear to her husband. Thus

did Satan as I said, pervert the yearnings of her faith in the promised Redeemer, and consequent desires for a posterity, into a guilty and indefensible distrust of God and of his word. O how needful to be aware of Satan's devices, and to wait upon divine truth in the Lord's word, rather than to consult flesh and blood for its interpretation and accomplishment.

Plurality of wives had already occurred, and probably was not very uncommon in this period of the patriarchal world: but in the beginning it was not so. God made his creatures male and female, and joined them so in marriage, as a perpetual institution, declaring, that as the woman was bone of her husband's bone, and flesh of his flesh; "*therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.*" [1] When the Great Lawgiver of salvation appeared, not to destroy, but to fulfil the law, to carry man beyond the letter of its requirement to the spiritual character, wherewith the eye of a believer's love beholds it invested, he re-established the original compact. And as if this were not enough, his apostle made mar-

[1] Gen. ii. 24.

riage the mystic symbol of that spiritual union which exists between Himself and his chosen bride, the whole body of the Church of God. "*We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. This is a great mystery,*" adds the apostle, "*but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*"[1] Therefore unless the soul's unfaithfulness to God in Christ be tolerable, the marriage vow whereby man and wife are bound together, is a vow of most awful solemnity. The cause of God rests upon its violation. Wrath and misery have ever dogged adultery at the heels, and marked it with an especial emphasis of divine displeasure. In this case, although custom—not, be it observed the permission of God—might make Sarai's conduct less guilty, than such a wilful breach upon marriage sanctities would now be, yet did she most unnaturally, and therefore most unwisely, tempt her husband to act inconsistently with his duty to her, to the institution of God, and to his own character as a holy servant of Jehovah.

Here, as in other exhibitions of their respective characters, we find Abram in possession and exercise of a stronger faith than Sarai.

[1] Eph. v. 30, 32.

" She, to make God good of his own word to her husband, substitutes Hagar for herself: and in her ambition of an offspring, persuades him to polygamy. Abram had never looked to obtain the promise by any other than a barren womb, if his wife had not most unadvisedly laid the temptation in his way,"[1] and pressed it upon him as a duty towards himself, the world, and the engagements of God. When our own apparent means fail, weak faith projects strange devices to accomplish its hopes, and even to honour God by them. Ye therefore whose life is now the life, and whose walk is now the walk of faith, seek its full assurance in your hearts: that so, if God tarry in the fulfilment of his promise, you may wait for Him; and that, putting your hands into the unerring hand of a covenant God, your feet may not stumble upon the dark mountains of any deferred expectations. When the fulness of the time shall come, God, your faithful God will come also; and his advent will be attended with mercies which would have been absent if it had taken place, according to the unwise season of your expectations and unwise desires.

[1] Bishop Hall's Works, I. 28.

Abram saw the promise, though he saw not the means: but the importunity of his wife prevailed, and he became a partner in the fault of her unbelief. And doth not divine wisdom read us here a solemn lesson to walk by faith, and not by sight, in all our relations, and especially in those of the most intimate and endearing character? Bear the subject in mind, if you own the authority of God, profess to have embraced the promises of his salvation, and to walk with those who live as heirs together of the grace of life. Beware how your unbelief bring peril, not only upon yourselves, but upon the comfort of those, to whom your hearts are bound, and upon the peace of your families. Are you in difficulty or trial, and tempted to employ expedients, rather than to honour your Father which is in heaven, by ample and unhesitating reliance upon his word? Avoid the fault of Abram and Sarai, and you will avoid reaping the bitter fruits of their impatience and unbelief.

They do not appear to have sought the divine direction, either separately or together. There is no record of uplifted hands, and pleading hearts, that God would hasten the time for the fulfilment of his promise, in tenderness to their

feeble, trembling faith; or that He would gird up the loins of their minds by his Holy Spirit, to wait in patience until faith should give place to enjoyment. If you consult with flesh and blood, and human wisdom, you will fall, and Satan will prevail. If you lay the matter before God, you will have the leading of the pillar of fire and of the cloud. Follow it; and you will be guided by its unerring light into the land of promise. There is an inconsistency in unbelief, stamping it with the impress of folly, as broadly as with the impress of guilt. Sarai acknowledges that God Himself kept from her the blessing she desired, and blames Him not for this exercise of his sovereignty; yet she would force Him, as it were, to communicate the object of her desire, by methods which her better judgment, and doubtless, her better principles condemned. Lord, increase our faith!

If the history had proceeded no further than this palpable and guilty error, if Sarai's impatience, and the sad facility wherewith Abram yielded, had been alone related, a spiritual mind would have had little difficulty in drawing the inference. Many words therefore cannot be needed to consider,

II. THE CONSEQUENCES PRODUCED BY THIS FAULT.

In every circumstance of life, an affectionate stedfastness of purpose is a mental and moral qualification, whereby, under the exercise of that divine power which renews the heart in the image of God, much evil may be prevented, and much glory may redound to the Most High. It had been well if Abram had denied the request of Sarai, (and no sordid concupiscence on his part was a fellow pleader with her desires;) if he had conjured her to wait patiently the leadings of that hand which had brought them forth from the country of their idolatries, and measured out blessings to them with exceeding abundance. If, however, after all his pleading, she had yet been obstinate in her device of infidelity, while he remained firm, and exclaimed in his soul's stedfastness, 'So will not I thus distrust and dishonour God,' both of them would have been saved from exhibiting to the Church a measure of weakness and sin, which now the Holy Ghost hath recorded, in order to teach the faithful in Jesus Christ, that unmingled holiness is found in Him alone; and that they must be followers of saints, whether living or departed, just so far, and only just so far, as those saints were followers of Him.

But what was the mournful fact? "*Abram hearkened unto the voice of Sarai, And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived.*"[1] What follows this exhibition of sinful impatience on the one hand, and of sinful compliance with an indefensible weakness on the other? God came forth to testify his disapprobation. He permits Satan to produce, almost the inevitable fruits of departure from the godly simplicity of a healthy faith, in sorrow, misrule, and confusion. Family comfort is thus poisoned at its source, and family discord brings a long train of mischiefs into Abram's tent. "*When Hagar saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.*"[2] The divinely inspired wisdom of Solomon had experience, from which to draw its lessons of holy instruction: and this sad example, no doubt, among the rest, was present to his mind, in the enumeration of those three things, for which the earth is disquieted, and of the four which it cannot bear, one of which

[1] Gen. xvi. 3, 4. [2] Ibid. xvi. 4.

he testifieth to be "*a handmaid that is heir to her mistress.*"[1] And assuredly an offence against that purest and dearest of all human charities and sanctities, the relation of one man to one wife, according to the original appointment of God, is an engrafture of sin upon the course of life, calculated to produce the most unhappy results.

The handmaid not only expected that her child, if God should give her a son would be Abram's heir, and thus possess his temporal wealth; but above all, that he would be the progenitor of the promised Seed, and ancestor of the world's Deliverer. Here then was a point of imaginary exaltation, from which she looked down upon her mistress, less favoured of God, and therefore as she thought less worthy. And thus she became to Sarah what Peninnah became in later days to Hannah, when the Lord had shut up her womb, and her adversary made her fret, by triumphing over her for this lamented barrenness, notwithstanding God Himself withheld from her the treasure of the womb.

So far then was the scheme of Sarah from

[1] Prov. xxx. 23.

succeeding, however complacently she might have regarded it, that mischief and anguish heralded even the birth of the child; followed the son that God at length mercifully gave to herself, through the persecution of Ishmael; and made his posterity bitter adversaries of those who were born to Abram, under the promise in Isaac. Here is confusion and every evil work, brought by the great enemy, through this successful temptation, into a family, where a little while before, all was peace and holiness, and domestic love. "*How great a matter a little fire kindleth.*"[1] Watch we, then, and that with unslumbering perseverance of godly jealousy over the commencements of interruption to family concord. And be it ever in our remembrance, that as faith, even a simple reliance on God in his word, is the builder up of family peace,—so will the impatience of unbelief always be found one of the strongest and most efficient of all those disturbing forces, which exert their mischievous leverage to overturn the fabric of family love and joy.

Sarah's sense of wrong is now as clamorous, as her previous unbelief had been importu-

[1] James iii. 5.

nate. According to her own desire, the promised Father of nations, and Redeemer of human kind, is probably to be born of Hagar; yet her wounded feelings make all for which she had prayed, waited, nay sinned, appear as a despised thing compared with the pride of Hagar, and her own pride, which it wounded. How many rooms does sin find, wherein to lodge, when one sin hath opened the door of the heart. "*All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.*"[1] Other result was hardly to be expected, than that which happened: yet now Sarai's rage is even greater than her former impatience. Alas, we are selfish creatures, and self is a fearful tyrant, even in the minds of those whom the love of Christ, if the heart's unbelief did not oppose it so dreadfully, should constrain to deny themselves. Sarai said unto Abram, "*My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee.*"[2] Here was sad abandonment of that ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of

[1] Esther v. 13. [2] Gen. xvi. 5.

great price; and the manner wherewith Sarai repaid and revenged the pride and assumption of Hagar, surpasses the provocation itself, the punishment, (all things considered) is greater than the offence. Such is ever the character of sin. It grows on to more selfishness, until the transgressor loses sight of all tenderness and regard for others. The Devil is ever busy to make even the children of God conceal their own offences, by finding fault with others whom they have tempted, as authors of the consequences that do, and that must arise, but for which they should only blame themselves.

But what is the conduct of Abram in this irritating appeal to him? It seems to prove his freedom from all unhallowed love to Hagar, and to show that his consent had merely arisen from an unwise acquiescence in Sarai's mistaken expectation, of thus perpetuating a posterity and its mighty spiritual blessings to her husband. He said unto her, "*Behold thy maid is in thy hand: do to her as it pleaseth thee.*"[1] A soft answer turneth away wrath: and such an answer at least did the father of the faithful return to his inconsiderate wife. It deserves a

[1] Gen. xvi. 6.

question, however, whether his affection and loyalty to Sarai, and his love of peace were not carried to an unjustifiable extent. Was it indeed possible that Hagar should be thus about to fulfil those exceeding great and precious promises which Jehovah had made him? If so, did it not become his sacred duty to defend her from harm, and to hinder her from suffering by the ill temper and ill treatment of his wife? Every step which a believer takes from the simplicity that is in Christ, and from the exercise of faith in Christ, carries him forward in the sad employment of weaving a tangled web, wherein his own feet will probably be more and more ensnared; and from which only the mercy of an offended God can deliver him.

That mercy was not denied to any of the parties whose case is now under our consideration, although I can only briefly direct attention to

III. The Conduct of God to Hagar.

"*When Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.*"[1] Here was a new manifestation of rebellion and pride. It was her duty to have endeavoured to disarm her offended mistress, by lowliness and obedience; remem-

[1] Gen. xvi. 6.

bering her own offence, and those feelings in Sarai, for which she could not be without sympathy. But no; she is too great for reproof. She will peril her own unborn child;—she will peril her life;—she will peril the consequences of leaving a family where Jehovah is known and worshipped;—she will bring sorrow upon her husband and master,—but she will not remain in subjection. She follows the blind guidance of her own haughtiness of heart. And she has had imitators without number. There have been thoughtless, spiritually insensible, or most widely misled christian servants, who, in a moment of irritation, cast away their sense of duty, and their enjoyment of privilege, and fly to a desert, where no gracious refreshments are found, because they will not humble themselves in the sight of God and man.

Is Hagar then left to eat the fruit of this tree which her own hand hath planted, and which, as it is rebellion, may end in death? No; sin hath misled, but God will restore. Sin hath brought her into misery and bondage, but God will bring her back to liberty and peace. The Angel of the Lord, unquestionably the Angel of the covenant, found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, and said,

"*Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou, and whither wilt thou go? and she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.*"[1] Observe the angel's salutation,—the greeting of Him who came to seek and to save that which was lost! "Hagar, Sarai's maid,"—to remind the fugitive that although she had fled from duty, she had not been able to break off the yoke of authority. And what is the voice of the Redeemer's mercy to the sinner, who goes into a far country, sojourns in the wilderness of rebellion, and sets up the pole of his tent by the bitter waters of those sins, which turn the heart from God, and detain it an alien from his love? Conviction of guilt must be brought home upon the mind. God's authority, God's law must be asserted, and the transgressor must know, that it is an evil and a bitter thing to depart from Him. A return to God must be demanded, as by the angel to Hagar,—"*Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.*"[2] The law is thus made a schoolmaster to bring the offender to Christ; and although secret mercy hath hitherto dealt with him according to the terrors of the law, yet is every subse-

[1] Gen. xvi. 8. [2] Gen. xvi. 9.

quent step one of manifested mercy, when the heart in the obedience of faith has once said and acted upon the resolve, in the sufficiency of Almighty grace, "*I will arise and go to my Father.*"[1] Then do those radiant promises, of which some glimpses awakened hope, as faith made them visible to shine forth in their brightness, to bring peace and comfort, and joy into it.

The angel of the Lord said, "*I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude:*"[2] and then follow all those assurances concerning the character of her son's descendants, which have been, and are at this moment so wondrously fulfilled. "*Behold,* it is added, *thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction.*"[3] Yes, such is ever the language of the Angel of the covenant. The conscience-stricken offender may be mourning and miserable, and yet in much hardness of heart; scarcely lifting up any desires to God. But Jesus sees his afflictions, and hastens to relieve them, and fills the mind with peace and blessedness, by directing it to its home and its rest in Himself.

[1] Luke xv. 18. [2] Gen. xvi. 10. [3] Gen. xvi. 11.

Hagar's child must bear a name which shall be a memorial of her Redeemer's compassion and love. "*Ishmael, God shall hear.*" And thus when He brings his self-banished ones home again, He writes the record of his goodness, where they may continually turn the page to read it. The angel's love melted and subdued Hagar's heart. She called the name of that well whereby she sat, Beer-la-hai-roi, "the well of the God of vision, or the well of the God that seeth me." Faith now reigneth over unbelief, humility over pride, love over rebellion, and God was dear to her. A sense of holy shame is awakened within her mind, and she cries, "*Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?*"[1] Here is the outpouring of a godly sorrow, confessing and abhorring its past carelessness and ingratitude; owning the goodness and tenderness of the Saviour's preventing love, and all his compassion: and writing its own condemnation, in the moment when pardon and peace are bought, and sealed upon it. And you who know the goodness and grace of Christ, let Hagar's example be recorded for your imitation. How often did the Angel of the cove-

[1] Gen. xvi. 13.

nant look on you, wait on you, knock at the door of your hearts, beseech you to regard Him, but all in vain! At length He allured you into some wilderness of providential, or spiritual trial, and there spake comfortably to you; there vouchsafed to you visits of his goodness and grace; there filled you with peace, which the world could neither give nor take away. You perhaps forgot Him and rebelled against Him, in the hour of holy and gracious privileges; but his eye followed you into the desert, his goodness found you there, and his salvation there visited you. Beseech Him then to forgive your wanderings, pride, and hardness of heart; implore Him to accompany you back again to the path of forsaken duties: and to be unto you, in that path, your fulness of comfort, and your fountain of unfailing holiness and joy.

SERMON XXII.

THE COVENANT RENEWED AND SEALED.

GENESIS XVII. 1, 2.

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

It is an error greatly injurious to their spiritual prosperity, that Christians are so willing to be contented with less than God proposes, and promises to bestow upon them, in the person and salvation of their Great Redeemer. It was so even with the father of the faithful. Contented with Ishmael, and regarding him as the accomplishment of his wishes, his mind is turned away by the sight of one born after the flesh, from a spiritual seed, with all the fruit of mercy which it enfolded. He must therefore be awakened to higher hopes, and more glorious prospects, after he had been slumbering above thirteen years from the birth of Ishmael. Ac-

cordingly, another appearance of the divine word is very graciously vouchsafed him, to extend his view beyond the narrow horizon whereby it was bounded, and once again to bid him live by faith and not by sight. From this new manifestation, three subjects arise for our contemplation,

I. THE PROMISES AND COVENANT ARE RENEWED TO ABRAM, WITH ADDITIONAL CLEARNESS OF STATEMENT AND ASSURANCE.

He has now ceased to expect, as well as to desire another child: but even after this long interval, his impatience in the matter of Hagar must be tenderly rebuked; and he must expect the fulfilment of the most astonishing undertaking on his behalf. "He must therefore gird up the loins of his mind; be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto him." Accordingly, that most cheering announcement is made by the Angel of the covenant, "*I am the Almighty God, or, God All-sufficient.*"[1] His faith must be brought into vigorous, into laborious exercise; and therefore its Author and Finisher, testifies of his own Omnipotence; so that his servant may not

[1] Rev. i. 8.

only rest upon it, but triumph in it. And when such exceeding great and precious promises are made, and the Holy Ghost commends them to the heart, with what gracious recumbency may it rest upon them, as the same supreme authority testifies, that He in whom they are all yea and amen to the glory and praise of God is that divine surety, "*Which is, and which was, and which is to come, The Almighty.*"[1]

Such was the revelation made by Him to Abram. He is "*Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,*" for the furtherance and joy of faith in every promise of his word, and to every believer in his name. By this most encouraging title, El-Shaddar—All-bountiful to provide, and Almighty to fulfil, Isaac regarded God, when having blessed Jacob, he sent him for a wife to Bethuel at Padan-Aram.[2] Under this endearing title does the angel of the covenant exhibit Himself to Jacob, when his name was to be changed to Israel, and the promises made to his father were again assured to himself.[3] Under this title did He come to Moses, when the chosen heritage was

[1] Rev. i. 8. [2] Gen. xxviii. 3. [3] Gen. xxxv. 11.

to be delivered from the furnace in Egypt: "*I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty;* (El-Shaddai); *but by my name Jehovah was I not known unto them.*"[1] "As by his *self-sufficiency* the Most High has enough in Himself to denominate Him completely blessed; so by his *all-sufficiency* He is able to communicate as much blessedness to his creatures, as He has made them capable of enjoying. He is therefore able not only to supply all their need; but to do for them exceedingly abundantly above all that they can ask or think."[2] Ye therefore, who love and glorify the Saviour, for all that He hath done, may well lean upon Him, for all that He hath promised. Your salvation is as well-ordered as God would plan it; and as secure as an Omnipotent Surety and an inexhaustible fulness could make it.

An encouragement so high and glorious as this being given, a suitable precept is grafted upon it, that Abram may bring forth fruit unto holiness. "*I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect, or upright, or*

[1] Exod. vi. 3.

[2] Ridley's Body of Divinity, as quoted by Serle, Horæ Solitariæ, I. 45.

sincere." [1] Listen no more to unbelieving suggestions, which have their issues in crooked and sinful policies. Tread the path of a simple reliance. Be found unswervingly in the way of holy obedience, looking with a single eye to the divine glory, and casting all your care upon God. With a foundation of faith so immoveable, with the Omnipotence of the Saviour, with depths of love such as his heart contains, and with the caution and consolation which are at once suggested by the omniscience of our Lord, surely a Christian should simply commit all into his hand, and be solicitous only to perfect holiness in the fear of God. These considerations should swallow up all unbelieving solicitudes concerning things future, as the earth swallowed up Korah and his company. They should teach the Christian to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; in the firm persuasion that all other things shall be added unto him. If we are to walk with our Redeemer in holy communion, we must walk before God in holy sincerity.

This solemn preface being made, Jehovah goes on through various parts of the chapter, to

[1] Gen. xvii. 1.

renew that covenant already given to Abram, and in him to his posterity. Multitudes were promised to him, as descendants, including not merely those who should be natural children, born under the law, but a spiritual posterity, all indeed who being Christ's, should be truly, and in the highest acceptation, Abram's seed, and heirs according to the promise. From this high and heavenly genealogy does every Christian derive his gracious descent. His name is written in the book of life, as one of the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. That everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, is brought before him with reiterated pledges of divine truth and fidelity, every time he opens the Scriptures, and reads the promises of God in the gospel of salvation. And what can be given unto him, for all the necessities of his own gracious pilgrimage, and for the accomplishment of all his hopes, all his wishes, all his prayers for those most dear to him in the relations of life, than the assurance made to him representatively in Abram, and made as firmly, as if it were addressed immediately to himself, by an audible voice from heaven, "*I will be a God unto thee, and unto thy seed after thee.*"[1]

[1] Rom. iv. 16. 17. Gal. iii. 28, 29. Gen. xvii. 7.

The covenant so renewed is called an everlasting covenant, or a covenant of eternity. Its outward signs and mode of dispensation were changeable; as when Baptism was substituted for circumcision; but itself remains immutable. And therefore, as it is all the salvation of the people of God, so should it be all their desire, and the sure, steadfast anchorage of their hearts, whenever the winds and waves of temptation beat upon that ark of mercy, the Church, wherein the hand of God hath placed them; and where they shall be kept by his power, through faith unto salvation.

II. A DOUBLE SIGN IS NOW VOUCHSAFED, TO ENCOURAGE THE PATRIARCH'S FAITH.

From the world's most remote and early history, parents were accustomed to name their children, either from some regard to their immediate condition, or from some prospect of future mercies vouchsafed them by the Spirit of God. Thus Eve called her first-born, *Cain*, [1]

[1] Eve, not knowing the precise time when the promised seed was to appear, and doubtless very impatiently expecting his manifestation, exclaimed, we are told, on the birth of her first son, "*I have gotten* THE MAN, even JEHOVAH HIS VERY SELF. From this language, (for such is the literal reading of the original,) she seems evidently to have imagined, that the promised seed was *then* born into the world. But if such were her opinion, then, for some

for she said, "*I have gotten a man from the Lord.*"[1] Thus, when she bare another son, she named him *Seth*, that is, Appointed, "*for God*" said she "*hath appointed me another seed, instead of Abel whom Cain slew.*"[2] Thus also, Lamech named his son, *Noah*, that is, Rest, or Comfort; in expectation of consolation from him, because of the ground which the Lord had cursed. In this manner we may imagine the parents of the friend of God to have given him the name of Abram, a high father in the undiscerned, but overruling spirit of prophecy. And truly he was a high father, as the honoured ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the flesh. When however the covenant already made, was renewed unto him, with additional light, and solemn memorials, God saith "*Thou shalt no more be called Abram*—a high father; *but Abraham*, the father of multitudes,[3] the first letter of the Hebrew word, signifying a multitude being inserted in his former name. The reason is immediately added, "*For a father of*

reason or other, she must have believed, that the predicted MAN would also be JEHOVAH HIMSELF."—*Faber on the Patriarchal, Levitical, and Christian Dispensations, Vol. I. pp.* 201, 202. *See also the Note appended to those pages.*

[1] Gen. iv. 1. [2] Gen. iv. 25. [3] Gen. xvii. 5.

many nations have I made thee."[1] Even so Jacob was afterwards called *Israel,* when as a prince he had wrestled with God, and had prevailed. Still later in the church's history, Solomon was called *Jedediah,* because the Lord loved him. In this important change of name, it was intended that the friend of God should be known through all the ages of redemption; and that this alteration should prefigure the instatement of believers from among all nations, and kindred, and people, and languages, into the covenant and faith of Abraham.[2]

The same letter of number, and with the same mysterious significancy, is introduced into the name of Abram's wife, when a child is first promised immediately and unequivocally to herself. Hitherto she had been called *Sarai,* my princess, which she had been to Abraham: but now, *Sarah,* a princess, a more general term, and emphatically her due, as the mother of many nations, both in the flesh, and in the Lord. All holy believers of her own sex are called her children by the Apostle Peter:[3] and St. Paul makes her the type and allegory of that glorious antitype, the Jerusalem which is above,

[1] Gen. xvii. 5.

[2] Owen on the Hebrews, I. 459.

[3] 1 Peter iii. 6.

which is free, and which is the common mother of all the family of God.[1] Kings of people were to descend from her. The promise was literally fulfilled, in the long royal line of Judah, and in the revolted sovereigns of Israel. But they who understand and prize the blessings of a spiritual descent, may regard her with the reverence of a closer and dearer claim, than any which ancestry, conferring this world's royalty, can set up: for in the covenant given to her, as she was represented in Abraham, and, like his own portion, embracing the promises of Jehovah, they are made kings and priests unto God. Even through that promised seed, of which she was to be the favoured mother, they have become "*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that they should show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.*"[2]

God, in his dealings with the ancient Church, occasionally assumed a name, which might impress the minds of its members with the recollection of some extraordinary mercy. This is his name, whereby He shall be called, "*The*

[1] Gal. iv. 26.

[2] 1 Peter ii. 9.

Lord our Righteousness."[1] And when the Father would "*bring again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.*"[2] He styles Himself, "*The God of peace.*" Elsewhere He is Jehovah and Shammah, "*The Lord is there.*" On the other hand, when new covenant blessings are opened to, and conferred upon the Church, the glorious Head of all its members gives that Church a new name, even as the wife assumes the name of her husband, and the bride that of the bridegroom. "*Thou shalt be called,*" said God to Zion, "*by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed desolate. But thou shalt be called Hephzibah,* (my delight is in her,) *and thy land, Beulah,* (that is married;) *for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.*"[3] In the blessings of justification and adoption, they who are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, have a name given unto them, a new name, which hidden, as their life now is with Christ in God, they may not themselves know, in all its preciousness: but

[1] Jer. xxxiii. 16. [2] Heb. xiii. 20. [3] Isaiah lvi. 5. lxi. 2, 4.

which, as they adhere to the truth and precepts of their Saviour, and overcome in the might of an Omnipotent Redeemer, shall be made legible to them by the spirit of adoption, as to the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

III. A SEAL IS APPENDED TO THE COVENANT FOR FURTHER SURETY TO THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM.

"*This is my covenant which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee: every man-child among you shall be circumcised: and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you.*"[1] The engagements of men with each other are certified in various methods: and God hath condescended to similar means for the establishment of his promised mercies in Jesus Christ. Sometimes they give their *word:* and God who cannot lie hath pledged his own inviolable promise. Sometimes they make *written engagements:* and in the gospel "*these things were written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life in his name.*"[2] Sometimes *witnesses* are called in for assurance. And "*there are three that bear*

[1] Gen. xvii. 10, 11.

[2] John xx. 31.

witness in earth; the spirit, and the water, and the blood:[1] besides that internal witness, which every believer hath within himself. Sometimes *an oath* is to men for confirmation an end of all strife: and God "*willing to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.*"[2]

Again, men affix *their seals* to covenant engagements. God therefore, besides the privy seal of his own engagements to his children, on their hearts, when they are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, hath appended the broad outward seal of his covenant by visible symbols, for the confirmation of faith, and to assure the truth of the promises. Such a seal was *Circumcision*, to that covenant of eternity made with Abraham in Christ Jesus, to the world of believers. "*He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised: that righteousness*

[1] 1 John v. 8.

[2] Heb. vi. 16—18.

might be imputed to them also. And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only: but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had, being yet uncircumcised."[1] And although this very significant rite was adopted by many nations, without the law of God, or any acceptance at his hands, yet, as continued in Abraham's posterity, according to the promise, it was the uniting principle of the whole Church, however dispersed into various families. And thus there is one baptism in the Christian Church: as there is "*one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.*"[2] The sacraments of both dispensations are seals of the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ. They are God's attestation that He hath given unto sinners eternal life, and that this life is in his Son; and they are so received by every true believer.

Circumcision therefore, was not merely a sign to represent, but a seal to ratify the covenant of grace to Abraham and his posterity in faith. Moreover its character was not merely

[1] Rom. iv. 11, 12. [2] Eph. iv. 5.

sacramental, but *typical;* It symbolized man's state by nature, as born into the world an heir of guilt and pollution, and testified "that without the shedding of blood is no remission of sins." It shadowed forth the great and glorious righteousness which is by the faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe. It especially regarded and pictured the mortification of the heart—even the death unto sin, and the new birth unto righteousness;—the inward circumcision of soul and spirit. And such was its gracious purport, as pressed upon the Jewish disciples at Rome by the great apostle, when he said, "*He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly: and circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*"[1] In each of these points of view, it hath reference to the Christian circumcision, made by the Holy Ghost without human hands, upon all the members of the Lord, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ; being "*buried with Him in baptism, wherein also they*

[1] Rom. ii. 28, 29.

are risen with Him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." [1]

But, it may be asked, Why is Baptism now substituted under the Christian Dispensation, for that rite which was the seal of salvation, under the Old Testament? Simply because that atoning blood, of which it typified the necessity for remission of sins, having been shed, the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit, whereof water is the emblem, is effectually secured by that great and glorious redemption-price paid by the Son of God upon the cross. Circumcision had reference to a Saviour, who should redeem men unto God by his blood. Baptism, beholding the ransom paid, buried its subjects unto the death of sin, that "*like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so they also might walk in newness of life.*[2] And it is a remarkable coincidence, that circumcision was instituted in the very place, (Hebron) and at the very time of the year, where, and when John was born, who changed Circumcision into Baptism.[3]

Of this evangelical circumcision, every mem-

[1] Col. ii. 12. [2] Rom. vi. 4. [3] Lightfoot's Works, II. 91.

ber of the Christian Church, admitted within its pale of sacred and substantial privilege by Baptism, hath been made a partaker. He has been constituted "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." It hath not only an outward sign, but an inward and spiritual grace: and I cannot but think, that when this initial Sacrament of redeeming mercy is separated from the mysterious operation of the Holy Ghost, we reduce it to a form, very far below the intention of the great Head, and Saviour, and Prophet of the Church, and the gracious blessings which He meant it to convey. No man, indeed, may take upon himself to separate the effectual working of the Holy Spirit from Baptism, without making void all the ordinances of the visible Church, which become ceremonies, idle, and worse than idle, except for the faith that the Holy Spirit may be in them, and truly is in them, to all, unto whom the Father grants the faith of his presence. But subsequent life must exhibit the power of this grace, or the consequences will be dreadful. "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not,* (baptized or unbaptized) *shall be damned.*"[1]

[1] Mark xvi. 16.

Amongst the many practical inferences deducible from the subject, I can only mention three of a very obvious and simple character.

I. *The solicitude of Abraham for the child, whom God had already given him.* The son of the promise is now to be given; but Abraham cannot overcome the yearnings of nature; and fearful lest his eldest born should be altogether rejected, his parental feelings almost wrestle with the promises of God, and he cries, —"*O that Ishmael might live before Thee!*"[1] As though he had pleaded, "I know that one shall be born from me and Sarah my wife, for whom Thou wilt reserve thy especial favour; but let not the son whom Thou hast already given me be cast out and neglected. Continue him, I beseech Thee unto me, and bless him also." How beautiful the pattern of parental solicitude which this earnest prayer exhibits! My christian brethren, to whom the God of all the families of the earth hath given children, as arrows in the hand of a mighty man, do you thus watch at the gate of mercy with a similar petition? Do you pray that your children may live before God? Extend your prayers, I be-

[1] Gen. xvi. 18.

seech you, to spiritual blessings; and plead for *them*, as the supreme good. Plead that the life of your children's souls may be precious in the sight of your own covenant God; and await his answer, in the unwearied hope of faith and patience.—"*As for Ishmael, I have heard thee.*"[1] If your efforts and your prayers be limited to the attainment of earthly prosperity and lengthened life for them, God may hear you in the letter, but may send leanness withal into their souls; and you may bring a curse upon them, and not a blessing.[2]

II. *The promptness of Abraham's obedience*

[1] "A significant indication that something was intended beyond a merely temporal meaning and fulfilment, in the covenant of Ishmael is contained in the fact, that this covenant was given, as the immediate answer of prayer; of the prayer of Abraham for a spiritual blessing. The sacred record moreover is careful to inform us, that Ishmael obtained the promise of a divine blessing, for this special reason, *because he was Abraham's seed.* In the natural fervour of parental love, Abraham had prayed, that God would grant him in favour of his son Ishmael the blessings just promised in behalf of Isaac who was yet unborn. "And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!"—a prayer, to which the consoling answer of Jehovah is, "As for Ishmael, *I have heard thee.* Then follows the promise concerning him, which is afterwards repeated with the remarkable addition; "And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, *because he is thy seed.*" Foster's Mahometanism Unveiled. 1. 118.

[2] See a remarkable anecdote in Rutt's Life of Calamy. Vol. I. pp. 500. &c.

to the command of God. When the gracious promise was made him, he fell on his face, and laughed,—not doubtingly, but delightedly, as well as reverentially. "*He staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.*" [1] His was the joy of faith; for no doubt at this time the eye of his belief was partially opened to see the day of the Son of Man; and he saw it, and was glad. That faith led him to an immediate regard of the divine command. The self-same day, he himself, his son, and his household were circumcised. He makes no difficulty, sues for no exemption on the ground of his own age, or all the variety of excuses which a rebellious heart might have offered, and which would probably have been, not merely plausible, but convincing to the world around him. He makes haste and delays not to keep the commandments of God. And when covenant promises come home to the heart in their power and sweetness, realized there by the hand of the Holy Ghost, obedience to covenant duties must be not only performed without murmuring, but offered with delight. It must not be a matter of calculation

[1] Rom. iv. 20.

whether these duties be painful or pleasant to flesh and blood. One question is alone to be asked by every christian,—"Is this duty according to God's pleasure and appointment? Then will I rise up in the strength of God to perform it; and I will run the way of his commandments, as He shall set my heart at liberty." Shew that you have indeed embraced the promises, by holy and self-denying zeal for all the precepts of God.

III. *The willing submission of Abraham's household.* A rite is enjoined upon them, painful in itself, and calculated to bring them into contempt with the people, among whom they dwelt. It might be fitting for Abraham himself, and his son Ishmael to submit to its shame and anguish. But why should they who were born in his house—why especially should they who were only bought with money, and might therefore be supposed to have little sympathy with their master's relation to God, be called upon for the same sacrifice? and that sacrifice being demanded, why should they make it without one recorded murmur? The question can only be answered by the supposition, that Abraham had been blessed in teaching them the way of the Lord, and making them, like himself,

believers in the salvation of the promised Seed. Exercise the same holy diligence and devotedness, in those families, at whose head God hath placed you; and look to a gracious present reward, in seeing them, or some of them at least, prepared to follow you in the way of life, by taking up their cross, and bearing it cheerfully before God in the universality of holy obedience.

SERMON XXIII.

THE ANGEL JEHOVAH APPEARS TO ABRAHAM.

GENESIS XVIII. 17—19.

THD LORD SAID, SHALL I HIDE FROM ABRAHAM THAT THING WHICH I DO: SEEING THAT ABRAHAM SHALL SURELY BECOME A GREAT AND MIGHTY NATION, AND ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED IN HIM? FOR I KNOW HIM, THAT HE WILL COMMAND HIS CHILDREN AND HIS HOUSEHOLD AFTER HIM, AND THEY SHALL KEEP THE WAY OF THE LORD, TO DO JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT; THAT THE LORD MAY BRING UPON ABRAHAM THAT WHICH HE HATH SPOKEN OF HIM.

THE great operations of nature upon the surface of the world, are usually preceded by signs and warnings of their approach. Even the copious showers, whereby the fields are refreshed, testify of their coming by the lowering sky, and by some heavy drops, to assure us that the windows of heaven are about to be opened, and that there is a sound of abundance of rain. A similar procedure may be observed, both in the general history of the Redeemer's Church,

and in the less obvious records of individual experience. The promise made to Abraham, and embraced by him through faith, both for himself, and for his gracious posterity, was now upon the eve of fulfilment: and therefore clearer, and more frequent manifestations of the divine purposes are made to him than heretofore. Those which are at present to be considered, demand and deserve our devout attention. May the Author and Finisher of Abraham's faith, bless the consideration to our hearts!

There are two principal subjects, into which this portion of his history may be divided.

I. THE MYSTERIOUS VISIT WITH WHICH HE WAS FAVOURED.

It came gradually, and almost imperceptibly, like the approach of day to the earth: or as the Sun of Righteousness in Christian experience or divine mercy, so often rises upon man's heart for life eternal, with healing in his wings. In this case, as in the kingdom of God within the soul, there was "*first the blade, then the ear, and after that, the full corn in the ear.*" [1]

(1.) *The Manifestation itself. Jehovah appeared unto Abraham in the plains* (or under

[1] Mark iv. 28.

the oaks,) *of Mamre.*"[1] But how was the amazing disclosure made? He sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; employed, it may be, in considering the goodness of God, and calling upon his soul to exercise faith on promises lately renewed, in a manner the most gracious, but still in no sensible train of accomplishment; and probably also, calling upon God to strengthen his soul, still to wait the fulness of Jehovah's time, when the blessing should be given and enjoyed. He sat there also, as it would appear, on the watch for any travellers who might be oppressed and fainting beneath the noon-day sun; to bring them into his tent, for rest and refreshment. And the mind of a believer will always find itself expanded with love to man, while it dwells upon the assurances of a Saviour's love to itself, and communes with the throne of grace in prayer. While thus employed. "*Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and lo, three men stood beside him:* (or rather opposite to him as he sat, and at some little distance from him, *and when he saw them he ran to meet them from the tent-door, and bowed himself toward the ground.*"[2] Upon the nature of these

[1] Gen. xviii. 1. [2] Ibid. xviii. 2.

three mysterious visitants, various opinions have been held in the Church. Many of its early fathers maintained, that the adorable Trinity thus appeared to Abraham in a visible form: and their conclusion is adopted by learned and holy writers in more modern times.[1] Among the rest, Lightfoot, in his summary of this chapter, observes, "The three persons in the Trinity dine with Abraham, and again foretel the birth of Isaac. The Son and the Holy Ghost go down to Sodom; but the first person in the Trinity stays with Abraham, and condescends to his prayer, as long as he asks."[2] To my own mind, however, this view of the case is encompassed with difficulties hardly to be surmounted; and especially with those arising from a visible presence of God the Father, and God the Holy Ghost, invested with the form of our human nature, and with the declaration made in the next chapter, by two of the three, "that Jehovah had sent them to destroy Sodom." The general and most simple conclusion seems to be, not that it was a manifestation of the whole Trinity, nor yet, that the three who appeared were created angels, taking

[1] See Witsius on the Covenant, quoted by Biddulph.
[2] Lightfoot's Works, II. 91.

the likeness of men; but that two were indeed of the number of these ministering spirits, while the third was the Lord of angels Himself, whom we have already seen brought before the eyes of Abraham, for his furtherance and joy of faith. It was indeed the opinion of the Jewish doctors, that three angels were sent to Abraham their father; because, say they, it cannot be that more things than one should be sent by the hand of one of the high angels. The first angel as they affirm, was sent to shew glad tidings unto him, that Sarah should bear Isaac; the second, to deliver Lot from the overthrow of Sodom; the third, to destroy that guilty city, and all who partook its iniquities.[1] Two then were angels by nature, and one only by office, the Angel of the everlasting covenant: for in all that occurred between Him, and his servant Abraham, if a divine person be not openly described, there is no meaning in language, and we can have no assurance that God ever spake or acted as He is represented in the Scriptures of his own truth. That one of the angels was indeed over all, God blessed for evermore, we learn infallibly; because the high

[1] See Ainsworth's Annotations upon the passage.

and incommunicable name of Jehovah is ascribed to Him more than ten times in this and the following chapter.

To Him then, as invested with some visible impress of majesty, the patriarch addressed himself with the lowliness of civil reverence; because the disclosure of superhuman glory had not yet been fully made; beseeching Him, and his companions in travel, to enter and refresh themselves within the tent. And thus, in the exercise of that hospitality wherewith the Apostle exhorts us not to forget to entertain strangers,[1] he himself and Lot, the same evening entertained angels unawares. It is a subject wondrous in itself, and deeply interesting to contemplate, that the Lord of life and glory should tread the plains, and shelter Himself beneath the oaks of Mamre, to bring a blessing to Abraham: even as, when He really assumed our flesh, and tabernacled in it, He sat wearied and thirsty by the well of Sychar, that He might seek and save a sinful woman of that unbelieving city. But as nothing is too hard for Omnipotence to perform, so nothing is so low, as to be beneath the con-

[1] Heb. xiii. 2.

descensions of Infinite Love! It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world,—that the Son of God took human nature upon Him, to seek and to save that which was lost.

Abraham and Lot entertained angels unawares. Deeply and abundantly was the hospitality of each recompensed and overpaid. "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" [1] Was it more Elijah's or the widow's gain, when he took of her cake, and of her oil from the bottom of the cruse? Was it more the happiness of Zaccheus, that he received the Lord gladly; or of Jesus who condescended to abide at his house? There can be no hesitation about the answer. And let me ask those who have received any of the servants of God, and given them the prophet's chamber, and the prophet's meal, whether they have not found their guests leaving a blessing behind them, in some fragrance of the alabaster box of ointment, when they talked of the love of Jesus, carried them, by Him to the mercy seat of God in prayer, and bade them know in the depths of gracious experience, that where two or three were met

[1] Acts xx. 35.

together in his name, there was He in the midst of them?

The Word of God is coming on a message of judgment to Sodom: but He stops by the way, upon an errand of love to Abraham. Of this nature is the high commission wherewith the Father hath endowed Him. He is on the way at this hour, to take vengeance on them who know not God, and obey not his Gospel. But He tarried for a while in the tents of earth; and He tarries at this moment in the tabernacles of glory above, upon employments of mercy to his people—to purify every believer in his name, from sin, in the laver of his atonement, and to number that happy object of his love among his saints, for glory everlasting. Nay, He tarries to knock at the door of all our hearts. Open them, O Holy Spirit of God, by the Almightiness of thy grace! And then, blessed Saviour, enter them with Thyself and thy salvation; and manifest Thyself unto them, as Thou dost not unto the world!

(2) *The communications vouchsafed to Abraham were entirely worthy of the manifestation which the Son of God had condescended to make.* That entertainment, which a believing heart provides for the Saviour in the glad

readiness of its faith, He delights to accept; for his own Holy Ghost hath made the preparation within it: and He invariably blesses the exhibition of those graces, which He has implanted in the heart. Accordingly we find, that when Abraham's feast was ended, the angels said unto him, "*Where is Sarah thy wife?*" *And he said,* "*Behold, in the tent.*"[1] Then follows the promise, which Omnipotence alone could make; and which therefore He in whom that Almightiness was vested, could alone pronounce; "*He said, I will certainly return unto thee, according to the time of life,* (either at the corresponding period of the following year, or when Sarah might become a mother in the course of nature,) *and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son.*"[2] Men exercise a morbid sensibility towards any doubt of their truthfulness, when they promise to others; and deeply resent the least hesitation to give them full and immediate credit for all they undertake. Christ, on the other hand, whom the unbelief of his children every moment dishonours, and the rooted infidelity of his enemies every moment defies, meekly and mercifully repeats his promises, and rebukes only thus, and by fulfilling them.

[1] Gen. xviii. 9. [2] Gen. xviii. 10.

As the blessing approaches—nay at the very time when it is about to be conferred, Sarah hesitates to give God credence in his announcement; as though the tidings were too joyful to be true. She laughed—not in the joy of Abraham's simple faith on a former occasion, when the same promise was made, but with a mixture of incredulity and delight: and she is reproved by that unwearied love, wherewith, when sin aboundeth in the children of God, grace doth much more abound. She is rebuked with a mild dignity, which the mercy that dwells in the heart, and rises from the sympathies of Christ can only exhibit—rebuked both for the first unbelief, and for the subsequent falsehood, wherewith she vainly endeavoured to cloke her sin. "*She denied, saying, I laughed not. And He said, Nay, but thou didst laugh.*"[1] May God pity, pardon, and remove our unbelief! Is any thing too hard for the Lord? Does one trembler here look for mercy; feel the sweetness of a promise; feel the need of it, as God in his Son hath held it forth to the Christian's hope; and yet doubt whether it be not too much to expect? Remember his

[1] Gen. xviii. 15.

own encouragement to prayer. Plead with Him, that the hand of the Holy Ghost may lift you above the dark valley of distrust, and fix you upon the faithfulness of those engagements, which are sealed and made sure in the blood of Christ. "*Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.*"[1] Enter upon a present enjoyment of all the exceeding great and precious promises, by a present faith; and let your soul delight itself in their fatness. "*Blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her of the Lord.*"[2]

These things being done in the tent, "*the men rose up from thence, and looked towards Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.*"[3] He could not lightly resign a fellowship so delightful as this. His heart had burned within him, while the Saviour talked with him, and if he could not secure that Saviour's stay, he would at least attend Him for awhile. And sure I am, that they who have been with Him on the mount, and found it good to be there, have eagerly sought to prolong their happy communion, and felt their hearts sink within them, when He hath

[1] Mark ix. 25. [2] Luke i. 45. [3] Gen. xviii. 16.

gone up from them in the place where He talked with them. Abraham's zeal for companionship with his Lord, had a gracious return: for, as on the evening of his resurrection Jesus opened the understandings of his two disciples, to understand the Scriptures, while He talked with them by the way, and sat at meat with them in the house where they had constrained Him to enter—so did He inform his disciple, at this time, of his purposes of judgment to others, as well as of unbounded mercy to himself. "*The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation; and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in Him?*" [1] Mark then, how graciously our Lord manifests his purposes, when He manifests them at all, to those who follow Him in faith. "*He that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him.*" [2] "*Henceforth,*" said He to his disciples, "*I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I*

[1] Gen. xviii. 17, 18. [2] John xiv. 21.

have made known unto you."[1] The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.

Mercies from God never come alone to his holy servants. One leads another by the hand; and they succeed each other through every step of the pilgrimage. To him that hath shall more be given, and he shall abound. Abraham is to be a great and mighty nation; and he is to be the depository of divine intentions: partly to distinguish him, and partly because he will be the medium of testifying of God's truth to succeeding generations. When the heart-searching Saviour hath tried his servants and found them faithful, they may expect nearer and dearer communications of his will. "*I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.*"[2] He would promote the glory of God in his own family; and he shall have an opportunity of exercising his zeal and love for others. He has also relations in Sodom, and they shall be delivered. The advantages of family religion, never stay

[1] John xv. 15. [2] Gen. xviii. 19.

within the threshold where they are first communicated. They who are witnesses for God within the doors of their own habitations, shall bear testimony farther than they imagine; and they shall be blessed in their deed.

The denunciations being made against Sodom, two of the angels departed thitherward, on their solemn errand, of inquisition and vengeance. But Abraham stood yet before the Lord. How then did he employ these priviledged moments of holy intercourse with Jehovah? Not in improving the manifestations of love and favour already vouchsafed him, for his own personal or family advantage; but in disinterestedly attempting to deprecate the wrath of Jehovah against the guilty cities wherein Lot dwelt. I notice then,

II. The Intercession of Abraham in favour of Sodom and Gomorrah.

It sufficed him not to stand yet before the Lord: he availed himself of the tokens of divine condescension, to draw nigh unto Jehovah, in the full and confiding supplication of that holy familiarity which the great Mediator of the covenant allowed him. His prayer was fervent,—it was that of lowly reverence, and soul-prostration; but it was also that of faith in his

Saviour's mercy. "*Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*"[1] He does not instance Lot by name, but includes him among the holy servants of God, who (as he trusted) might yet be found within the guilty circuit of the five cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar; of which the first was the metropolis in greatness as in crime, and therefore put for all the rest. Among them all, he hoped that fifty righteous yet remained. He exercised the judgment of that holy charity, which sits so gracefully upon the children of God, in forming their opinion of others; but which is, alas, a grace so rare, and of such little growth among those, who knowing their own guilt, and utter hopelessness, except from the Sovereignty of mercy to them in a vicarious Atonement, should therefore hope the best concerning others.

Abraham's plea is remarkable; "*Wilt thou also destroy, and not spare the city for the fifty righteous that are (or may be) therein?*"[2] If the holy seed were thus to be the substance of the cities of the plain; and their indwelling to be, as it were, a shield interposed between

[1] Gen. xviii. 23. [2] Gen. xviii. 24.

the guilty and the wrath of God, how safely may the righteousness of Him, in whom his true disciples are the righteousness of God, be represented before the throne, and pleaded in God's hearing as an infinitely valid reason, why He should turn away from his anger, and spare, and be appeased! Does not a praying Christian fitly look unto the Judge of all the earth to do right, whensoever he brings forward the Righteousness of God his Saviour? Blessed be God, there is One, in the dark and dismal guiltiness that overspreads the Sodom of our nature, able to save his servants from their sins; and whose Righteousness is unto all, and upon all them that believe. Are any of you standing before the Lord, admitted into a happy nearness of communion with Him? Improve his presence, in behalf of those who are yet lying in darkness and the shadow of death; as the Church in the Song of Solomon is zealous for the Gentiles who knew not God, "*We have a little sister; what shall we do for her in the day when she shall be spoken for?*"[1] And while the unbelievers around you, little reck of your appeals to the mercy of God in their

[1] Cant. viii. 8.

favour, put Him in remembrance concerning them. Give Him no rest, in the hope that He may yet bring them unto Jesus, and make them pass from death unto life, in his work of Almighty mercy upon them. When Augustus Cæsar overcame his rival Anthony, and took Alexandria, its citizens expected only ruin; but he proclaimed its pardon, for the sake of his friend Arius the philosopher who dwelt there. With what assurance then, of hope should Christians be remembrancers with God, that He may spare the transgressors around them, for his Son's sake, who dwelt among them; who came to save even the chief of sinners; and with whose glorious mediatorial work and Person, the Father is always well pleased! If there be a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments, and which shall walk with the King of Saints in white, because they are worthy in his worthiness, they ought to be unwearied and fervent advocates for the dead and careless souls in whose neighbourhoods they dwell. "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*"[1]

The holy followers of God are the support

[1] James v. 16.

and stability of any land. Laban's flock increases for Jacob's sake. A blessing falls, not only on Potiphar's house, but upon Egypt, because of Joseph. When the holy seed that grows in any outward Church, among its unbelieving and ungodly members, is ripened and gathered in, God will pull down its hedges, and lay it waste, and command his clouds that they rain no rain upon it. He can do nothing until they be out of the way; and by their holy zeal, the anger of God is sometimes turned away from the camp of Israel; as the plague was stayed, when Phineas stood up and executed judgment; or as God pardoned the host, when Joshua stood on his side, in the matter of Achan.

My Christian brethren, who have graciously been taught the holy art of wrestling with God for yourselves, abound in intercession for others. Your hearts will surely then be enlarged, when you can pour them out for guilty, godless relatives; for a guilty and a godless people; that they may be snatched as brands out of the burning. Open your mouth wide, and God will fill it with answered prayer. If God hath testified to you, in the Bible, of his coming wrath against sinners;—if your faith hath received the record;—if you tremble for them, while,

sunk in unbelief, and alienation, and insensibility, they care not for themselves, why is the knowledge of their peril given, except that you should abound in petition for them? When the spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon you, should it not overflow from your hearts on their behalf? We have here the first recorded prayer: and let us not forget that its character is purely intercessory.

Divine condescension emboldens Abraham to persist in beseeching Jehovah's mercy towards these guilty cities. Every petition brings him nearer to a number so small, that surely he may not hesitate to think he has satisfied the requirement of God, and ensured the safety of Sodom. And at every petition does the mysterious angel graciously and tenderly tempt him to go onwards; until at length he comes within ten persons: they, he doubts not may be found, without passing beyond the family of Lot. Fearing therefore to trespass further upon the condescending grace, which had hitherto borne with him, he ceases to pray. So long however, as the petitioner continues to ask, does God continue to grant. Abraham wearies in prayer, while Jehovah is unwearied in hearing and answering his supplication. Shall you then, to

whom the life of prayer is the life of peace, and joy, and privilege, as well as the life of appointed duty, restrain prayer before God, while unbelievers are perishing around you; while your Father who is in heaven, is always more ready to give than you to ask; and while He waits to bless you, for yourselves and others, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus?

The mediation of Abraham was unsuccessful, not, as I imagine, because God by some secret impulse overruled him from praying longer, in behalf of Sodom, as when he closed the prophet's lips from interceding for his sinful heritage, "*Therefore pray not thou for this people; neither lift up cry nor prayer for them; neither make intercession to Me: for I will not hear thee,*"[1]—but because Abraham himself thought his request now secure, and ceased to wrestle with God. There is however a Mediator, whose Advocacy never fails, because his plea of merit is infinitely precious in the Father's eye; and because He ever liveth to make intercession for all who come unto God by Him. Seek the footstool of mercy in his name: "*Ask, and*

[1] Jer. vii. 16.

ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you."[1]

And you, for whom they who have gracious access to their Father in heaven, are pleading ever with groanings that cannot be uttered, while you are yourselves careless of your misery and danger,—you, over whose heads God's saints behold the sword of his justice and vengeance hanging as by a thread, while you are banqueting beneath it unmoved and secure, I intreat the mercy of the Most High, on your behalf. You against whom the Daniels whose fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ in prayer, see the hand writing upon the wall which declares you to be weighed and found wanting, doomed, sentenced, and about to die for ever, while you, slumbering, cannot observe the sentence, because the god of this world hath blinded your eyes,—I pray, in deep anxiety for your deliverance, that the God of heaven may enable you to discover that there is but a step between you and death. "*As it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded: but the same day that*

[1] Matt. vii. 7.

Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man shall be revealed.[1] Do not think that because you are insensible, God is forgetful; that because you dream of security, He will sleep also, and never awaken you. "*To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*[2] *Behold now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation!*"[3] The Lord may be now tarrying, while some of Abraham's spiritual children are imploring Him to save you. He stops perhaps, until their prayer is poured out, and their lips closed, and then He may go towards you in the city of your sins. If He find you there, find you out of Jesus Christ, find you girdled with walls of brass in your unbelief, will they be too strong for Him to break? The men of Sodom might have resisted an earthly foe, but when the fire and brimstone fell down from heaven, the dreadful tempest did its office, and the sinners were overwhelmed in that awful deluge of flame. You can no more put aside the Arm of God, than they could avert the storm of fire. Arise

[1] Luke xvii. 28—30. [2] Psalm xcv. 7. [3] 2 Cor. vi. 2.

then, and pray for yourselves. Are you guilty? Christ will be your Righteousness. Are you polluted? He will be your Sanctification. Are you in spiritual bondage? He will be your Almighty Redemption. Are you lying among the pots of habitual sin? He will create you anew unto good works, and "*ye shall be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.*"[1]

[1] Psalm lxviii. 13.

SERMON XXIV.

THE FORTUNES OF LOT.

GENESIS XX. 1.

AND ABRAHAM JOURNEYED FROM THENCE TOWARD THE SOUTH COUNTRY, AND DWELT BETWEEN KADISH AND SHUR, AND SOJOURNED IN GERAR.

THE promise, to which Abraham's hope had long clung, was now about to be accomplished, according to the set time that God had declared to him, in the plain of Mamre. But the ark of his faith was to be tossed to and fro, by waves of temptation and sorrow, before the assured season of its rest arrived, in the fulfilment of divine undertaking concerning him. The love of man which ever dwells in the heart, where the love of God hath taken up its abode,—the yearnings of affection for his kindred,—his holy submission to the judgments of the Most High,—and the stability of his confidence were to be

sternly tried, before the birth of that son, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed, as well as himself and Sarah. Some of these exercises are now to be placed in a brief and rapid sketch before you. O that God the Holy Ghost may bring them home with Almighty power to every one, whether a follower of Abraham's faith, or yet lying in the sin and peril of wilful unbelief!

I. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

It is the duty of an earthly magistrate diligently to examine into those offences, which his office calls upon him to punish. And "*shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*"[1] The cry of those guilty cities had come up to God, because their sin was very grievous. But instead of visiting them with instant severity and wrath, and raining the deluge of fire and brimstone upon them at once from heaven, He determines to make, as it were, an inquisition upon the spot. "*I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me: and if not I will know.*"[2] The Righteousness of Jehovah,

[1] Gen. xviii. 25. [2] Gen. xviii. 21.

is thus graciously manifested to his servant, in much condescension. Abraham's mouth is stopped; and God is clear when He judgeth. The very messengers whom He sent, must add their personal testimony on the spot, to that awful cry, which the sin of Sodom had already uttered in the ear of the Lord of Hosts. Its citizens gloried in the shame of their tremendous iniquity; and a miracle from God, exerted to save the angels and Lot from their unnatural violence, failed to convince them. Sentence therefore is given against them, and must now be executed without delay. God had long awaited their repentance; and a few hours before had even invited the intercession of Abraham in their behalf. But there is a limit even to that mercy which flows in long-suffering, from the depths of God's compassion towards sinners: and if they will not only remain impenitent, but even challenge Him to do his worst, vengeance will at length come upon them to the uttermost. If they will tempt God to open the windows of heaven, and descend in indignation, they must die for ever, under the act of their daring and presumptuous folly; like that philosopher, who without due precaution, en-

deavoured to bring down lightning from the clouds, and perished in the experiment.

The sin of Sodom had reached unto heaven: the smoke of her guilt had gone up, as the smoke of a furnace, enkindled in the bottomless pit; and the smoke of her burning was now also to go up, for God had remembered her iniquities. When all was ready, and these sinners against their own souls had lulled themselves into perfect security,—when the sun was risen upon the earth,—that sun which they thought would light them to new scenes of profligate delight, "*the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah, brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven: and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and that which grew upon the ground.*" [1] They are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance, not only of temporal destruction, but of eternal fire,—not merely, as I imagine, to give the offending world a type of hell,—not merely to mark the wrath of God against iniquity obdurately committed, by exhibiting the standing wonder of the Dead Sea to be his witness, while the earth remains unconsumed,—but to

[1] Gen. xix. 24, 25.

shew the terrors of everlasting judgment, as denounced against them by the sentence of God. Our blessed Lord Himself has so represented their condition: and it is no proof of man's wisdom, whatever it may be of his morbid and perverted sensibility, that he should wish to be more merciful than God, even than God in Christ Jesus, who died to reconcile the world to Himself.

Conscience may now be steeped in sin, and drugged by indulgence into stupor and insensibility towards the judgment of the great day. But that judgment must come:—and, once passed, the gnawing of the worm that never dieth, the stings of an awakened conscience, forcing the soul to a dreadful remembrance of the past, infinite grace neglected, and the Redeemer's Atonement despised, the overflowing sense of present misery, with no pleasure to beguile the anguish, the hopelessness of the future, the absolute despair of the place of woe, which language may not tell, nor imagination paint, will form a dreadful aggregate of misery. "*Consider this, ye that forget God, lest He pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you.*"[1] If in a sleepless night, any im-

[1] Psalm l. 22.

penitent provoker of heaven's wrath, counts the hours, and every minute appears tedious, from a mere undefinable sense of weariness, then what will he do, when his obdurate transgression shall make him food for the worm that never dieth, and fuel for the fire that never shall be quenched? "*Who shall dwell with the devouring fire? who shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?*" [1]

But while the Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished, He knoweth also how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to snatch them from dangers, into which their own covetousness, or other carnal and worldly motives have led them. And when they would assuredly perish in the general sin, if He did not interfere to restore and save them, in the undeserved exercise of his own faithfulness of mercy towards them. While Jehovah "*turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemning them with an overthrow, and making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly, He delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: for that righ-*

[1] Isaiah xxxiii. 14.

teous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous soul, from day to day, with their unlawful deeds."[1] The well-watered plain of Sodom, fruitful as the garden of the Lord, had enticed him into these dwellings of unbridled iniquity: but while he stood aloof from sharing in the surrounding guilt, he was remembered of God, and perished not in the iniquities of the city. Judgment, though pronounced could not be executed, until he was past the accursed boundary. When the assurance of coming vengeance was revealed to him, "*he went out and spake unto his sons in law which married his daughters, and said, Up, get ye out of this place: for the Lord will destroy this city.*" But the love which yearned over them, and wrestled with them for their lives, strove in vain. "*He seemed as one that mocked to his sons-in-law.*"[2] Surely the testimony which holy relatives, and pleading ambassadors for Christ will be called to render before the throne of judgment, against those who meet their cry to flee from the wrath to come, with contempt and scorn, must be one of awful import. If, when they proclaim judg-

[1] 2 Peter ii. 6—8.

[2] Gen. xix. 4.

ment and mercy, the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience, and the blood of the Lamb of God, which cleanseth from all sin, their message of love be regarded as only a cunningly-devised fable, what must be the issue?

If, however, they cannot be instrumental in saving others, the word of God calls to them with infinite urgency of mercy, to save themselves: as when the morning dawned, the angels hastened Lot, saying, "*Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.*"[1] And then it would appear, that an especial call from the great Redeemer of man Himself, is made to Lot, not to remain a moment near to this doomed and devoted city, but to flee to his appointed refuge: "*Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*"[2] It is not enough, that one whom infinite love hath taken

[1] Gen. xix. 15, 16. [2] Gen. xix. 17.

as by the hand, should be content to escape, and only *just* to escape, the wrath of God! He should flee beyond the manifestly accursed boundaries of sin, and not stop short of the fulness of salvation in the Rock of ages, nor linger near the scenes of former guilt and unbelief. "*Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth towards those things that are before, he must press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*"[1] The engagements of God towards his servants, impose upon Him a gracious necessity of love, to secure their preservation. When Lot was accepted for Zoar, the Lord said unto him, "*Haste thee, escape thither: for I cannot do any thing until thou be come thither.*"[2] His holy word, the record of goodness already experienced by his saints, and of goodness to be fulfilled in all its length, and breadth, and depth, and height of mercy, to those who shall yet believe on Him to life everlasting, abounds with similar instances. The command is given to all who sojourn in the spiritual Sodom, against which wrath must go forth to the uttermost, "*Come out of her, my*

[1] Phil. iii. 13, 14. [2] Gen. xix. 22.

people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues:"[1] and they have the assurances of deliverance to encourage them, in fleeing to the ark and mountain of salvation, in the Lamb of God. It is commanded to the fifth angel, when he has commission to sound his trumpet, that no hurt should be done, except to those men which have not the mark of God on their foreheads. And when the glory of the God of Israel, came to the man with the writer's inkhorn by his side, He said unto him, "*Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.*" And to others—to those in whose hands He had put the slaughter weapon of judgment, He said, "*Go ye after him* (whose office was to seal the holy mourners for impregnable safety,) *through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark.*[2] The destruction of the wicked is linked to the eternal

[1] Rev. xviii. 4.

[2] Ezek. ix. 4—6.

salvation of the righteous, and the Son of Man is the Dispenser of both. But ye whom the God of mercy has vouchsafed to own as his just and righteous ones, in the holy and consistent walk of faith, suffer me to plead with you, to make no sojourn in the tents of any known or suspected iniquity—to linger there, no, not a moment; even though in the hope that you may lead others out with you. Escape for your lives. Beseech, and intreat, that those whom you love would follow you; but plead and pray, with your loins girded, and your staff in your hand, and yourselves in haste to be gone; nay, already set forth upon your steadfast and eager way from the city. And as you flee along, (just as the chosen of Israel drank of the river through which they passed in pursuit of Midian, without stopping to rest in their progress,) cry earnestly, "Come out from among them and be ye separate without delay, else will you suffer loss indeed. If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the sinner and the ungodly appear? If these things are done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? Flee at once to the cross; and you will be made more than conquerors through Him who loved you."

Lot was delivered; but it was with the utter loss of all that had led him to choose the fertile plain of Sodom. Flocks, herds, and friends, died in the destruction of the city. If, as many have imagined, Lot had two daughters, not merely betrothed but actually married, they died with their unbelieving husbands, who took his earnest call for pleasantry, and God's awful voice, uttered by him, as a jest; for two unmarried ones only followed him to Zoar. Here was a sad and fearful breach in the patriarch's family, to testify against the marriage of believers with unbelievers. Here was a woe fallen upon him, where he was most vulnerable; and, when launched from this bow, Christian parents deeply feel the arrows of the Almighty in their hearts. O strive, ye, with whom it may be thus, to pluck these wanderers, as brands from the burning. Like an eminent saint of God, himself a father, charge your children to flee from their iniquities, to salvation in the Son of God, and bid them beware, that they meet you not, at the great tribunal, in sin and unbelief." [1]

And ye who appear to have left the city of

[1] Robert Bolton, see his Life, prefixed to his "Four Last Things."

your former transgressions,—ye whom some conviction of sin have led to fear lest you should be consumed, look not behind you. Take an everlasting leave of iniquity. Institute an immediate divorce of every thought and every affection of your hearts from that state, wherein the call of God's ministers has found you. Remember Lot's wife. She walked not steadfastly, and side by side with her husband and her children. If all her daughters were with her, yet was her heart bent upon the substance, and wealth, and friends left behind. If two daughters had perished in the general ruin, she was perhaps bewailing them. It is plain, at least, that her heart was still in Sodom: she looked back in desire, as did the mixed multitude afterwards from the camp of God in the wilderness; and she became a pillar of salt,—a monument of the wrath of heaven, against a hollow-hearted profession of religion. "*He that putteth his hand to the plough, and looketh back, is unfit for the kingdom of God.*"[1] Had she remained near her husband, had she leaned on his hand, and listened to his counsels, she might and would have been saved. But she

[1] Luke ix. 62.

looked from behind him, she lingered, and she died. Never follow the Head and Captain of your salvation afar off; never halt behind those who are following the Lord fully, if you are earnest in professing to seek the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. Strive to keep up with those who are foremost in the blessed way. Gird up the loins of your minds: be diligent, zealous, and unwearied in the might of the Holy Spirit: and "*so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*" [1]

And ye who sin against God, and all his goodness, and not least his long-suffering, with a high and daring hand, think not that ye shall be safe from the hour of his wrath, if ye continue to neglect and mock the hour of his mercy. Think not that ye shall escape the coming woe. "*It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you.*" [2] If ye will declare your sin, as Sodom, and publish it at Gomorrah,—if ye will contemn the messengers of life and mercy, ye are not far from the day when the Judge shall appear

[1] 2 Peter i. 11. [2] Luke x. 12.

against you. "*He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*"[1]

II. But while Sodom and all its guilty indwellers thus perished in the gainsaying of their sins, WHAT WAS THE CONDUCT OF ABRAHAM? He had interceded for the city,—wrestled with God earnestly on its behalf; and had he dared to hold fast by God for another supplication, would have prevailed for its deliverance. His example, the parables of our Lord, the new and living Way into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, the mercy-seat sprinkled with that blood, and all the ready help of the throne of grace, whither the Father invites those who have learned, and who love to pray, all unite to bid them to be importunate—to pray and not to faint; and especially not to faint in intercessory supplication for friends yet without the fold of salvation, and for the land wherein they dwell. While many around you, who might have communion with God, and the interest of a gracious unity with the Great Intercessor, are thoughtless and impenitent, will ye not pour out your hearts

[1] Prov. xxix. 1.

unto your heavenly Father, in their behalf, that so Israel may be a blessing in the land of Assyria?

Abram's heart was deeply affected towards Sodom; and he dreaded its ruin. He gat up therefore early in the morning to the place where, the preceding day, he had stood before the Lord, probably to renew his supplication, if yet there were hope: *and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and beheld, and lo the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.*" [1] His intercession therefore failed, as to the full extent of its object: but it failed not, in one dear and especial part of his desire. "*It came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.*" [2] Bless God for this encouragement, if any of you are bearing impenitent relations upon your hearts before Him. Pray in fervency, and pray in faith. Put God in remembrance concerning them—pray for them, as the woman of Canaan clung to her Redeemer in behalf of

[1] Gen. xix. 28. [2] Gen. xix. 29.

her afflicted daughter; and hope for her answer, "*Great is thy faith; be it unto thee, even as thou wilt.*"[1]

The smoke of ruined Sodom was Abraham's pillar of fire and of cloud, to direct his steps from a place, where he perhaps thought all was lost, and Lot himself consumed in the conflagration. "*He journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.*"[2] Another instance, and one that saddened his heart indeed, was thus given him, that he had no resting place, but must strike his tent, and journey onward. And surely the providences of God that daily meet our eyes, and his not unfrequent present and visible judgments, against guilty lands and guilty souls, should teach those whom the light of heavenly wisdom hath reached, that here they have no continuing city: and induce them, with increasing diligence, increasing watchfulness, increasing fervour of prayer, and increasing singleness of eye in looking unto Jesus, to seek that city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.

[1] Matt. xv. 28. [2] Gen. xx. 1.

II. A very few words must suffice concerning

THE SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF LOT.

It is a dark and dreadful page in the volume, that testifies with such perfect truth both of God and man. It was his sin, that he shrunk away from the divine command, to flee at once to the mountain. It was his sin to ask leave to go and dwell in Zoar, either as a little city, and therefore less guilty, as to its mass of sinfulness than others, or because he thought the request thus made to be a little one, which might be easily granted. Alas, nothing is little—no consequences are trifling which flow from opposition to the plain commands of God! He may accept us concerning the perverse desire of our hearts, and visit us with the rod and anguish of chastisement in that acceptance. Our short-sighted desire of avoiding the cross may be granted; and we may thereby fall into sin, from which we should otherwise have escaped. Once however in Zoar, Lot ought to have remained there. But now, dreading lest the fire should descend upon it, or dreading lest its inhabitants might slay him; or wishing, it may be, to find out Abraham, he went to dwell in the mountain, and his daughters with him.

There, he who had remained uncontaminated amidst all the sins, all the temptations, all the rebellions of Sodom, fell into a most guilty and God-dishonouring transgression. These things were written for our example, upon whom the ends of the world are come. "*Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*" [1] Concerning the circumstances which led the daughters of Lot to the monstrous act whereby they and their father sinned, and that so foully, much has been written. To my own view, their conjecture, as Bishop Patrick well observes, is the most probable, who conceive, that the eager desire which then possessed the hearts of those who believed in God at all, to obtain the promise of the Messiah, put them upon the perpetration of this awful iniquity. They had lived chastely amidst the iniquities of Sodom; and surely it is hard to imagine that a spirit of such tremendous uncleanness entered them as in a moment. They joined each other in this contrivance, contrary to that concealment, which all sins of uncleanness eagerly desire; thus testifying that they acted by counsel and design, and not merely by

[1] 1 Cor. x. 12.

the baseness of passion and appetite. They perpetuated the memory of this awful deed in the names of their children: and therefore appear rather to have gloried in it, than shrunk from the dread of discovery. The promise of Messiah was confined to the line of Shem, as they doubtless knew; and thinking their father alone left alive in all that descent, they made him a partner in their crime and guilt. O what is man, when human wisdom, (foolishness as it is with God,) takes the helm, and God leaves the pilot to himself!

But then how fallen is just and righteous Lot! Had any one looked him in the face, and testified in the midst of Sodom, that thus it would be, his righteous soul would indeed have been vexed, and he would have cried out in language like to that of Hazael in an after day, "*But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?*"[1] Many strong men hath wine beaten down, and bound in the chains of Satan; yea, men who once were strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; and whose recovery has been through anguish and shame unspeakable. Wine makes Lot forget

[1] 2 Kings viii. 13.

that he is a father, forget that his wife is dead, that only his daughters are near him. God and nature are forgotten and outraged; and that sin is committed, at which heaven and earth are ashamed; and which to this day stands an indelible record in the Scriptures, against this righteous man. Brethren, I beseech you most affectionately, and most tenderly, to set a watch upon yourselves, and avoid this sin. So far is drunkenness from being an excuse for sin, that as a moral writer has well observed,[1] you must multiply the guilt of drunkenness by the guilt of the outrages which it may tempt a man to commit; and then you have the product of the whole iniquity.

We hear no more of Lot. His sun goes down in a dark and dismal cloud. The children thus born become heads of nations, who persecute the heritage of God: and here is confusion and every evil work. Ye then, whom unsearchable mercy had led into the fold of salvation—ye who "*are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,*"[2] and whom a Saviour's tenderness in providence and grace hath led,

[1] Dr. Paley.

[2] 1 Cor. vi. 11.

even to hoary hairs, stand on your watch, with the utmost caution, that you may not dishonour God, in your last moments; but may bear testimony to the riches of his grace, the blessedness of his service, and the holiness of his salvation, until Christ shall bear you witness upon a dying bed of spiritual peace; and ultimately before assembled worlds, in the great day of his appearing. Take example, not only from the failure of Lot, of giving Satan any advantage over you, and of causing the enemies of God to blaspheme, through your sin; but also from the example of Abraham, the friend of God Himself. He dwelt in Gerar, and there, even (as we may believe), while he must have known that Sarah was about to bear the child of promise, sinned with Abimelech by distrust of God, after the similitude of his former transgression with Pharaoh in Egypt. I do not place it again before you; for it has been already noticed, and brought, as I would willingly believe, to be seen in the light of Scriptural truth. God's word and promises are pillars of immoveable faithfulness; rest upon them in every difficulty, and they cannot fail you. The cowardly dependence which so many place on their own miserable policies and expe-

diencies, equally dishonours God, and injures themselves. "*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.*"

[1] Prov. iii. 5, 6.

SERMON XXV.

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC.

GENESIS XXI. 1, 3.

AND THE LORD VISITED SARAH, AS HE HAD SAID, AND THE LORD DID UNTO SARAH AS HE HAD SPOKEN. FOR SARAH CONCEIVED, AND BARE ABRAHAM A SON IN HIS OLD AGE, AT THE SET TIME OF WHICH GOD HAD SPOKEN TO HIM. AND ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF HIS SON THAT WAS BORN UNTO HIM, WHOM SARAH BARE TO HIM, ISAAC.

WHEN our Redeemer stood before the grave of Lazarus, about to call his friend from the dead, and bade some of the bystanders roll away the stone, Martha said unto Him concerning her departed brother, "*Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he has been dead four days.*" Jesus rebuked the rising infidelity of her heart, and cried, "*Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?*"[1] And immediately her

[1] John xi. 39, 40.

brother was bidden to come forth from his grave, and live. The time during which the unsearchable wisdom of God may see fit to exercise the faith of his believing servants, upon any especial point of his promise, and their desire, may appear to be long, as it will be trying, but the end will be a full accomplishment. "*The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.*"[1] The patient expectation of a Christian never yet failed of its gracious reward, in all the good things which the Lord his God spake concerning him. It was thus with Abraham. He had need of patience; that after he had done the will of God, he might receive the promise: and now the Most High amply, and effectually redeemed the word of unchangeable truth to his servant and friend. The history therefore attests

THE HAPPY ISSUE OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

Throughout the whole process of divine dealing towards him, it was equally his duty and privilege, like his favoured descendants on the

[1] Hab. ii. 3.

banks of the Red Sea to stand still and see the salvation of God. Every thing was calculated to impress upon his heart that lesson of impotence on the part of man, and Omnipotence on the part of God, which at once attests an absolute need of divine assistance, and an unfailing refuge in the assurance, "*Not by might, nor by power; but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.*"

(1) *The mercy promised, was such as Abraham never could have expected to realize.*

When the word of the Lord came unto him in a vision, saying, "*Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward,*" he said, "*Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless.*"[2] And when after the birth of Ishmael, a son by Sarah was promised to him, some distrust seemed to have mingled itself with the power of a high and holy faith in his mind, at the improbable greatness of the promise, and he said unto God, "*O that Ishmael might live before Thee!*"[3] as though he would have been contented with less than Jehovah undertook to grant; and remain satisfied with a prospect that the world's Deliverer and his

[1] Zech. iv. 6. [2] Gen. xv. 1, 2. [3] Gen. xvii. 18.

own Saviour should spring from the son of the bondwoman. And is there not here something closely analogous to the experience of the life of faith, in every Christian? How often, and how long are they whom the Holy Ghost has convinced of sin, whom the Law has terrified, whom the anticipations of judgment have awakened, and to whom the Saviour's infinite grace and love are preached, hindered from finding rest to their souls in Him, by an overwhelming sense of the greatness of the very mercy for which they are panting! Thus, the abundance of that provision which God undertook to spread before his people in the wilderness staggered the faith of Moses. He said, "*The people among whom I am are six hundred thousand footmen; and Thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together to suffice them?*" "*And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shall see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.*"[1] If any of you are thus hindered from resting

[1] Num. xi. 21, 23.

upon the stupendous salvation of Jesus Christ, allow me to protest against this mistaken humility, which keeps you at a distance from the very blessings which yet you feel you must obtain, like Rachel's children, or else you die. The offer of the mercy is as full and free, as the mercy itself is inestimable. It was a revelation of goodness misunderstood by Manoah when he said to his wife, "*We shall surely die, because we have seen God.*"[1] Hath He promised—hath He freely laid before you, who hunger and thirst for salvation, its depths of love in his Son; and doth the Spirit invite you by the Scripture, to come and drink of the water of life freely? Take God at his word. Kiss the outstretched sceptre of his love. Plead his own offer; and cry to Him, "*So do as Thou hast said.*"[2] Let not the brightness of the Sun of Righteousness blind the eye of your faith, when it was intended to strengthen it. Let not the sound of mercy in the gospel, overwhelm your sense of spiritual hearing. What God in his Son thinks not too great to give, that do not ye dishonour his love, by thinking too great to receive. Come behind the Saviour in all the

[1] Judges xiii. 22. [2] 2 Sam. vii. 25.

fulness of his glorious power to bless you. If your feeble faith can do no more, yet touch the hem of his garment; and you shall be made whole. His thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor his ways as your ways. "*O ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt?*"[1] Lift up your hearts, each in its fervent aspiration for the rich blessing of an ability to repose on the faithfulness of God. "*Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief:*"[2] and you shall not expect, nor ask in vain.

(2) *While the mercy itself was great, the difficulties in the way of its accomplishment were, to the eye of Abraham's sense, insurmountable.* He was called upon, even against hope, to believe in hope, that he might be the father of many nations—of Jews according to the flesh, of Jews and Gentiles according to the faith of Jesus Christ. If he considered his own body, now dead, as to its agency towards the hope which God had set before him, that hope could only have been the mockery of his desire, since he was now an hundred years old. If he considered the deadness of Sarah's womb, where was the human possibility that his posterity by

[1] Matt. xiv. 31. [2] Mark ix. 24.

her should be as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable? What then was Abraham's resource? Just that to which every one who is partaker of like precious faith must betake himself, in the sense of his own destitution. He considered not the deadness of his own body, nor that of Sarah's womb. He looked far beyond them both. He believed God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not, as though they were: who called him a father, and Sarah a mother, when sense pronounced it to be impossible. Therefore it was that he staggered not through unbelief; but was strong in faith giving glory to God. His difficulties served only to place him, where faith has its best and its only proper exercise, as a helpless but patiently expecting believer, in the arms of an infallible promise. To rest upon the all-sufficiency of God for the accomplishment of that which is impossible to aught beside, is faith indeed. It is that grace, at which the infidel may mock, and whereof he may make his scorn; but which is the soul's only wisdom, peace, and true repose.

It is also faith's best office to fix itself peculiarly on that revelation made by God of

Himself, which is immediately accommodated to the difficulties wherewith it is surrounded. Is Abraham to believe that from his dead body a multitude of nations must proceed? What then is his refuge? Even to rest on God who quickeneth the dead. Carry this directory (at once the most simple and efficacious, that even the word of God itself can give) into all the circumstances of your Christian life, as God hath quickened you from the death of trespasses and sins, and raised you up, together with Christ, in the living membership of his body. Do you mourn over the guilt and pollution of your iniquities? "*The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin.*"[1] Do you ask help, in utter inability to fulfil the law? "*He is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*"[2] Doth conscious sin appear to separate you from the throne of grace, and make you doubt of acceptance there? "*If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.*"[3] He is able, in virtue of his unchangeable priesthood, to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him. There is a leaf of the Tree of Life

[1] 1 John i. 7. [2] Rom. x. 4. [3] 1 John ii. 1.

for the healing of every malady: and like those of the Cedars of Lebanon, its branches grow so near the ground, that the shortest and feeblest of the children of God may pluck from them, and apply the leaves with the hand of faith to all their spiritual maladies and necessities.

In human undertakings there may be a want of sincerity in the promiser or a want of power to fulfil his engagements; or else an absolute forgetfulness to make good his own declarations; as Pharaoh's butler forgot his word to Joseph. But in Christ Jesus all the promises of God are yea and amen to his glory; and He cannot deny Himself. No limit can be placed in the way of his Almightiness; no voice can come forth even from the greatest and apparently the most insuperable difficulties in the way of fulfilment to his word, and say unto Him, "*Hitherto shalt thou go and no further.*" [1] It is a sound and noble principle of our English constitutional law, that no lapse of time however great, nothing in fact short of absolute impossibility, can prevent the sovereign from recovering the debts and obligations due to his crown; nor diminish his power to vindicate the

[1] Job xxxviii. 11.

honour of his sovereignty, nor yet his right to avenge the wrong that may be committed against his dignity. He is supposed to be always occupied for the public good; and therefore may not have leisure to assert his right, within the time limited to subjects. It is the same in the government of God. No time can deprive Him of the ability to make good his engagements. No lapse of years can deliver the subject creation, and every part of it from its liability to his Almighty government. The period of human expectancy may have passed, and hope may have subsided into despondency. But with God all things are possible: and his promise may be fulfilled at that very moment when despondency began to take the place of hope: and at evening time the horizon of promise long delayed, may be light. Zion's feeble faith may tempt her to say, "*The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me:*[1]" but it is mere infirmity, charging its own defect upon Jehovah in his engagements for the salvation of all who trust Him. That doubter's mind is like the eye of one who looks up at the heavens, and thinks the whole firma-

[1] Isa. xlix. 14.

ment, with all its suns and stars in motion, while that imagined motion is in reality only the revolution of the little planet whereon he stands. "*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea she may forget, yet will not I forget thee.*"[1] When God therefore calls you to believe on Him, and to wait in faith the time of his appointment, remember that He is glorified if patience has her perfect work. Do not consult with flesh and blood. Do not ponder the difficulties, but rest upon the promise: and thus will you who believe be strong in faith, giving glory to God. "*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*"[2]

(3) *Abraham's experience was a proof that the promises of God, as the God of truth, are assurances, than which nothing more is needed,—that he who believes them shall undoubtedly enjoy them.* The righteousness of God in them is revealed from faith to faith—from the faith, or faithfulness of God declaring, to the faith or confidence of man receiving. With Him there is no variableness neither shadow of turning.

[1] Isa. xlix. 15. [2] Mark ix. 23.

The Surety of those promises is an unchangeable Mediator Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Though we believe not, yet He continueth faithful: He cannot deny Himself. The gospel is glad tidings of great joy, even to the chief of sinners. All its provisions of mercy rest upon the truth of God. We know that the condition, the only condition upon which the engagements of compassion to a perishing world are based—even the blood-shedding of the one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, hath been fulfilled. The proclamation hath gone forth—a sound of common mercy—"*Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*"[1] The truth of God the Father, the truth and work, the sayings and the sufferings of God the Son, in our nature—and the faithfulness of God the Holy Ghost, are a three-fold cord that cannot be broken, on which the most trembling Christian is encouraged to suspend all his hopes and all the momentous interests of his soul. And if you

[1] Isa. i. 18.

are seeking salvation by the gracious process of their appointment, will you thrust away your own comfort, and lay a suicidal hand upon the life of your own hope by unbelief? If a general proclamation of pardon be made to the guilty—and if not one name hath been revealed as excluded—if the Saviour cries, "*Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest*"[1]—and if in this universal amnesty of redeeming love there be no bill of individual exception, why will ye write bitter things against yourselves, and think that what is designedly published for all, was never meant to extend individually to you? Believe, ye who are anxiously looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, that He is dealing with you in the simplicity of his truth: and so shall you enter into rest: so shall you cry, "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*"[2]

If the servants of Benhadad eagerly watched the lips of Ahab, to gather up any expression

[1] Matt. xi. 28. [2] Psalm xlii. 11.

of friendliness, however equivocal, that might fall from him towards their master in his helplessness and misery, and brought Benhadad before the king of Israel, upon the poor encouragement—"He is my brother;" why should any one, conscious of his need, and yearning for deliverance from the peril wherein he is placed, hesitate to close with all the offers of mercy, poured upon him, so to speak, for the very purpose of overwhelming all unbelief: as the waters of the deluge descended from the opened windows of heaven, and the broken up fountains of the great deep, to destroy the guilty world? While the trumpet of that liberty wherewith Christ alone makes free from the thraldom of sin, utters its breath of mercy, so long and loudly, why should the poor bond-slave hesitate to rise up and claim the gracious freedom whereto he is thus called? When the gates of the city of refuge are thrown widely open upon the hinges of infinite and everlasting love, and there is a voice from the walls encouraging the manslayer to draw nigh, why should he hesitate without, and await the coming moment, when the avenger of blood shall overtake him? While mercy is so ready to receive all comers, surely they who, trusting to it with

the greatest confidence, flee towards it with the readiest speed of their hearts' motion, shall have the fullest and the dearest welcome; for they most truly honour God in the salvation of his own appointment. While the minister of the Church prays you in Christ's stead, "Be ye reconciled to God;" as though Christ Himself did beseech you, rest on that double line of fortification to your hope, which ready love, and this amazing condescension unite to form; and be strong in faith, giving glory to God, in closing, heart and soul, with the message of his mercy.

It may be long before you enter into all the power and sweetness of the promises, in the full assurance of faith: for the Canaanite of unbelief may be put forth before you, only by little and little. But if it be thus, you must learn, with Abraham, to glorify the truth and power of God, in the twilight, or even in the darkness of expectancy: his *truth*, like Abraham, in the set time, which He hath reserved in the secrecies of his own appointment; and his *power*, like the patriarch also, in overlooking the age and deadness of himself and his wife. He has given you his Son already, as the hostage of his truth: and in the faith which He will

bestow upon you He will give you the hostage of his Spirit, for the full accomplishment of that salvation, whereunto the youngest and feeblest among the children of God is called, according to his Father's purpose and grace.

A little while before the day arrived when the father of the faithful was to be blessed with the child of promise, that promise, with all the magnificent prospect of blessing included in him, was more decidedly revealed, and the appointed season declared. And as they who believe the engagements of God are blessed, because there shall be an accomplishment of those things which were spoken, so will it often happen in the experience of such faithful ones, that new and more vivid communications of divine love, new and plainer sealings of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts—new and dearer earnests of the purchased possession shall be brought to them by the hand of the Spirit, to tell them not only of the plenty, but of the nearness of the promised land, and to uphold them during the few remaining marches that may yet lie between them, and the new wine, and the new corn of the Canaan that lies beyond the wilderness and the river.

Thus upheld, Abraham's faith triumphed

over all the opposing and embarrassing suggestions of sight and sense. "*He staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.*"[1] And therefore, not only was his faith counted unto him for righteousness, in the forgiveness of sins, through the promised Saviour, but, with reference to the promised seed, it was at once exchanged for vision. Jehovah, who cannot lie, visited Sarah as He said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bare Abraham a son, at the set time, of which God had spoken to him.

It is not uncommon in Christian experience, that believers against hope, believing in hope, look for the promises of mercy towards them, with the fretfulness of Sisera's mother, rather than the repose of Abraham, saying, "*Why is his chariot so long in coming, and why tarry the wheels of his chariot?*" I would affectionately beseech such characters, feeble, though sincere in faith, to go forward in the way of passive acquiescence, and holy duty; for the Lord their God will, ere long, make their darkness to be light. Yet a little while, and

[1] Rom. vi. 20.

He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry, and when He shall appear with Almighty power to accomplish all his undertakings, those tried and tempted ones, shall reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them. "Hold out," said a saint of God to the graces of his heart, which had been long in exercise, as the Almightiness of the Holy Ghost maintained their constancy, while greatly exercised,—"Hold out, faith and patience, a little longer, and then I shall need you no more for ever."

It must however be remembered, that Sarah is the church's mother, no less than Abraham the father of all them that believe: and the happy issue which I have endeavoured to illustrate, was granted to *her* belief, not less than to that of her husband, stronger and more unswerving as it was. "*Through faith also, Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.*"[1] "*Therefore*, (that is of *Sarah's*, not less than *Abraham's* holy confidence,) *sprang*

[1] Heb. xi. 11.

there, even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude."[1] At first she merely considered the promise, in connexion with her own circumstances; and then its utter improbability, according to the course of nature, struck upon her mind, and she laughed with incredulity. But when her mind, according to the true nature of faith, turned away from the promise, in connexion with herself, to its connexion with the Almighty Promiser, she knew that his power could remove all difficulties, and his experienced faithfulness would lead Him to do that whereof He had spoken. Her faith is held forth as the Church's example: and it testifies for the imitation of all the daughters of God, who partake the privileges, duties, and responsibilities of wedded life; that they be followers of their believing husbands, and so be included in their blessings, and large dispensers of blessings to them. Rest, ye who look to be mothers in the spiritual Israel of the Church, upon the truth of God, while you plead before Him the children of promise whom He has engaged to give you. There you rest upon the Rock of ages. All

[1] Heb. xi. 12.

difficulties, all seeming impossibilities in the way of that Faithful One who hath promised, will pass away, like the ebbing tide from the rock. Your soul shall magnify the Lord for his accomplished mercy; your spirit shall rejoice in God your Saviour.

Abraham called his son's name "*Isaac*," according to the divine command, linked as it was to the all gracious declaration, "*I will establish my covenant with him, even an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.*"[1] The son's name testified to the father's joy, and to the holy laughter of the father's heart. Thus every time he named his child, he gave witness to the goodness of God, and to the delight that springs from a sense of accomplished promises. Nay, more than this: Isaac's name enkindled the joy of a sure and certain hope in Abraham's soul, connected with that everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, made by God with the child of promise, not less firmly than with himself. Learn, ye to whom that covenant hath a preciousness beyond all price, to connect every mercy you receive with it, and write upon each, the name, "*Jehovah Shammah*," *the Lord is*

[1] Gen. xvi. 19.

there."[1] So will those mercies give you double delight, by joining them to your Saviour and Surety in the covenant. They will thus be enlarged, by being consecrated to the divine glory. And thus, while they who know not God, and see not his hand in what they possess, receive their good things, as a perishing portion, held only by the same tenure with the breath in their nostrils, and then to be succeeded by the wretchedness of an everlasting destitution, you will find every bestowment of your heavenly Father's hand a possession for your immediate comfort, and an earnest of your everlasting blessedness.

[1] Ezekiel xlviii. 35.

SERMON XXVI.

ARGUMENTS FOR INFANT BAPTISM.

(PART I.)

GENESIS XXI. 3, 4.

AND ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF HIS SON THAT WAS BORN UNTO HIM, WHOM SARAH BARE TO HIM, ISAAC. AND ABRAHAM CIRCUMCISED HIS SON ISAAC, BEING EIGHT DAYS OLD, AS GOD HAD COMMANDED HIM.

"A WOMAN when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." Most eminently must this transition from the sad entail of the primitive judgment against sin, to delight and happiness, have been made good in the experience of Sarah. A barrenness long hopeless to the

[1] John xvi. 21.

apprehension of sense, and against which her faith was hardly able to plead the word of an unchangeable God, is removed by miracle: and at ninety years old she bears a son to Abraham. But if these newly-opened springs of natural love are dear and delightful to her mind, what must be the holy joy with which she views in the child of her old age, that promised seed wherein all the families of the earth were to be blessed, the progenitor of that glorious Redeemer, the seed of the woman, in whose all-prevailing Righteousness and Atonement, a lost world should find its peace, its life, and its salvation.

Being however by nature born in sin, and a child of wrath, by his natural heritage, the first and most solemn call upon the duties of parental love, is to make him, according to his father's faith, which looked forward to the Saviour's day with holy gladness, a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. The divine command had been given, that Isaac should be circumcised at eight days old. Abraham therefore, who had left his country, and his kindred, and his father's house at the bidding of God; who, according to the same injunction, had received in his own body

the sign and seal of the righteousness which he had by faith, being yet uncircumcised, hesitated not to impress it upon his son, at eight days old, with a joyfulness to which a sense of the mercies wherein the child would be thus instated, gave birth within his heart.

Now the circumcision of Isaac bears immediately upon the subject of Christian Baptism. That subject is very momentous in its aspect upon the duty of parents under the Christian covenant, upon the spiritual welfare of their children, and upon the true prosperity of the Church of God. It is at the same time little understood, and therefore undervalued by those who professedly bring their infants to the baptismal font, for union and membership with Jesus Christ, which is the very important end of Baptism. I propose therefore to employ two or three discourses upon the connexion between Infant Circumcision and Infant Baptism, as a subject suitable to the period and circumstances of Abraham's life, at which we are now arrived. I commend them, with much solicitude, to your earnest attention and candid consideration, in dependence on the Spirit and blessing of Almighty God.

As members indeed of the Church of Eng-

land, and therefore assertors of the doctrines laid down in her articles, you acknowledge that "the Baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ."[1] The arguments, however, against a practice so natural and endearing to the spiritual love of a Christian parent, are so confidently urged; and the faith of many concerning it, is, I am afraid, so feeble, because their information is so scanty and deficient, that it becomes a duty to consider

THE SCRIPTURAL ORIGIN AND AUTHORITY OF INFANT BAPTISM.

The connexion between it and circumcision, is at once obvious and important, and may therefore well be proposed as the foundation of the argument. Regarding then the father of the faithful as a parent, resting upon the sure promise of God, and Isaac as the child of promise, sealed by circumcision for the temporal and eternal fulfilment of every gracious engagement on the part of Jehovah, I propose to notice,

I. THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT, AS SUBSTANTIALLY THE

[1] Article XXVII.

SAME WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT OF SALVATION WHEREOF JESUS CHRIST IS THE SUM AND SURETY.

To speak of Abraham, only as the natural progenitor of the Jewish people; and of the covenant made with him, as bearing only upon the national polity of that race, regarded as a civil community, whereof God was the chief, is utterly to confound the distinction between a Church, purely so considered, and a commonwealth. Abraham was himself a believer in the promises of God, for his own salvation, and for the salvation of man in Jesus Christ. His faith was accounted to him for righteousness. But he was also the father of the faithful. As such, the covenant of redemption was made with him in Christ, and with all believers, as his spiritual seed, and that upon the same ground—their faith in God. "*He received the sign of circumcision,—a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also. And the father of circumcision, to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father*

Abraham, which he had, being yet uncircumcised."[1] When therefore the infallible testimony of the Holy Ghost was given, that his faith was imputed to him for righteousness, "*it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him: but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him, that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.*"[2] And therefore the tide of gladness hath flowed eastward, and westward, and northward, and southward, to Jew and Gentile, to Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, in that Scripture, "*If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*"[3]

We then, (equally with him who stands before the Church of Christ, marked with the creature's noblest distinction, as the friend of God,) "*are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*"[4] "*It is one God, who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.*"[5]

The original of the Jewish *Church* therefore, is to be referred, in its spiritual constitution to Abraham, as the father of the faithful: while

[1] Rom. iv. 11, 12. [2] Ibid. iv. 22—24. [3] Gal. iii. 29, [4] Phil. iii. 3. [5] Rom. iii. 30.

as a Church under political regulations, it must be referred to Moses, the great legislator of God's ancient people. And this distinction is plainly made by that great master of divine philosophy, St. Paul; "*This I say, that the covenant which was before confirmed of God (with Abraham) in Christ, the Law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise (to Abraham) of none effect.*"[1] A plain and positive distinction is here drawn, between the covenant made by God with Abraham, and his seed, when He called him out of the world, and that political engagement made afterwards with the Jews, when the Law was given to them, amidst the thunderings, and lightnings, and voices, of the burning mount. The promise that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham and his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."[2]

The Abrahamic covenant then, was in substance, that of evangelical grace and mercy, afterwards perfectly fulfilled, in the person, mission, and salvation of the Lamb of God,—of that great mystery of godliness, God mani-

[1] Gal. iii. 17. [2] Rom. iv. 13.

fest in the flesh, who as to his humanity took upon Him the nature, and was born of the seed of Abraham. Being therefore Himself circumcised, Christ was called a minister of the circumcision, to confirm the truth of the promises made to the fathers.[1] "*The promise is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end that it might be sure to all the seed: not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all*"[2] who truly believe in Jesus. Not then because the Israelites are the natural seed of Abraham, are they all spiritual children; "*but in Isaac shall thy seed be called:*" that is, "*they which are children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*"[3] This covenant, therefore, while the law was added because of transgressions, was to endure till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made,[4] that is, until the Eternal Word should become incarnate, of the seed of the woman, should open a fountain of absolute and eternal cleansing for sin and for uncleanness, in the laver of his blood.

[1] Rom. xv. 8.
[2] Rom. iv. 16.
[3] Rom. ix. 7, 8.
[4] Gal. iii. 17.

Tne evangelical character of this covenant, and its application, not to the natural but to the spiritual posterity of Abraham, appear also from its *initiatory sacrament—the rite of circumcision*, which God calls the sign of the covenant between Himself and the believing race of that much honoured patriarch.[1] Hence the covenant, whereof this painful process was a token, is called by St. Stephen the covenant of circumcision; while that circumcision itself is called by St. Paul, the seal of the righteousness of faith. Elsewhere it is made "the outward visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace," even the circumcision of the heart.[2] And agreeably to this spiritual signification, the great Apostle speaks of it. "*He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart; in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*"[3]

This covenant, then, embracing that great multitude of believers whom no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, collected in one blessed member-

[1] Gen. xvii. 11. [2] Deut. x. 16; xxx. 6.
[3] Rom. ii. 28, 29.

ship with Him who purchased the Church with his own blood, is really in its essence and character, that which is more fully promulged in the everlasting gospel of the grace of God. It consequently respects ourselves, to whom in these last days, God has spoken by his Son. I observe then secondly, that

II. INFANTS WERE CAPABLE OF PARTAKING ITS SIGN AND SEAL—CIRCUMCISION.[1] Were capable did I say? they were expressly commanded, and that under pain of a spiritual forfeiture the most tremendous, to receive it. "*This is my covenant, which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee; every male child among you shall be circumcised. He that is eight days old, or as it is in the original—a son of eight days shall be circumcised among you; every man child in your genera-*

[1] The two Sacraments of the Old Testament, which were more particularly copied in the New, are anterior to the Jewish Law. Circumcision, the preluder of Baptism, was not of Moses, but of the fathers. John vi. 22. Rom. iv. 11, 12. Gal. iii. 15. So also the Passover, the preluder to the Lord's Supper, was instituted before the Law was given. As these ordinances therefore were anterior to the types and shadows of the Levitical dispensation, they might substantially remain, when those shadows had vanished away, although their form should be changed, to make them more suitable to this last and best dispensation of mercy to mankind.

tions: he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, that is not of thy seed; and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."[1] The rite was therefore, of universal application. It was binding upon all who became members of that Church of the living God, which is formed of the seed of Abraham, not in his natural, but in his religious relation and capacity, as himself a believer, and the spiritual father of all them that believe. There is in fact no proof that God ever had a Church upon earth, where-

[1] Gen. xvii. 10—13. So jealous were the Jews not to pass beyond the eighth day before they circumcised their children, that they performed this rite on the Sabbath-day, if the exact time made it needful (John vii. 22, 23.) The eighth day seems to have been fixed, because creatures newly born were during seven days supposed to be unclean, and in their blood: but on the eighth day, they might be offered unto the Lord. (Lev. xxii. 27.) And so of mankind, (Lev. xii. 2, 3.) The same number of days was observed in many other things; as for the consecration of the priests, (Lev. viii. 33, 35, and ix. 1.); the cleansing of lepers, (Lev. xiv. 8—10); and of persons with unclean issues, (Lev. xv. 13, 14); the purifying of polluted Nazarites, (Numb. vi. 9, 10); and for purifying the altar, (Ezek. xliii. 26, 27.) See also Bishop Babington's "Comfortable Notes on Genesis." p. 67.

of infants were not members. The covenant with Abraham, being also with his infant seed, was to be sealed to them by the ordinance of that God who made it with them, in the gracious riches of his free salvation. The females were represented in the males, as in other cases, the head stood for the whole family. (1 Cor. xi. 3.) Religious blessings, religious privileges, religious obligations, are exclusively of neither sex; but equally the right of both, in the one God and Father of both, by the one Mediator Christ Jesus. "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*"[1] And when circumcision had been duly ministered, faith might plead the unspeakably great and precious promises of God.

Circumcision then was an ordinance of *latitude*, embracing all ages, and all conditions of men—Jews and Gentiles.[2] The first case of adult circumcision indeed, was not a matter of *choice*, but of *necessity;* for Abraham was ninety and nine years old when the seal was stamped upon his flesh, and the blessings of

[1] Gal. iii. 28.

[2] See Gen. xvii. 12, and Ainsworth on the Pentateuch, p. 67.

redemption by the Word made flesh, so secured to him. But as all his household, from the eldest to Ishmael underwent it,[1] as all who

[1] Circumcision concerned not the children of Israel only, but the whole seed of Abraham: for those children of his by his concubines, that lived in Arabia, as Ishmaelites, Dedanites, Medamites, Midianites, &c. were circumcised, as well as Israel in Palestine. The countries whither he sent them were once in the possession of the Canaanites, until he obtained them by the conquest of the four kings, and thither he sent them with the seal of circumcision upon them, which gave them interest in the land there, as well as Isaac had elsewhere. Circumcision therefore, served, not for the distinction of Israel from other nations, but of the seed of Abraham from all other people.—*Lightfoot.* IV. 276. Circumcision was to Abraham and his seed, the seal of the promise of Canaan. "I will give to thee and to thy seed all the land of Canaan; therefore thou and thy seed after thee shall keep my covenant." Hence, in after times, Joshua, when the people had entered the land, was commanded to circumcise them. Canaan it will be remembered was a type of the Gospel state, and of the rest that remaineth for the people of God. Adam, Enoch, Noah, &c. were not circumcised, because to them a fixed and settled residence for the Church was not designed; but when one was intended for Abraham, then circumcision was given also. *Lightfoot*, IV. 275.

"Circumcision, the initiatory seal of admission within the Jewish Church, must be considered the fundamental rite of Judaism. Mahometanism appears to have first raised the custom of circumcision, as practised by the pagan Arabs, from the character of a mere prescriptive usage, into which it had long degenerated; and to have restored it to its pristine rank, as a religious ordinance; by adopting, after established Jewish precedent, the rite of *circumcision, as its initiatory fundamental.*

With the christian Church, in which the sacrament of Baptism

were bought into it with money,—as Isaac, a son of eight days, submitted to it—as all strangers, who should afterwards sojourn with the congregation of Israel, and wished to keep the passover to Jehovah, were to receive this sign and seal of incorporation into the Jewish Church,[1] it appears that not only they who could understand its sacred import, and follow in the track of its duties, but they also who in the helplessness and ignorance of infancy, could neither comprehend, nor fulfil the solemn obligations imposed upon them, nor weigh the mighty sum of blessings, into which they were instated, were yet bound to receive the token, and thus join themselves to God in an everlasting covenant, not to be forgotten; but to be all their salvation, and all their desire.[2]

was substituted for the rite of circumcision, Mahometanism, at the same time contrives to maintain its spurious analogy; since, according to the Mahometan law, *Baptism*, no less than circumcision, is *accounted essential* in the admission of infidels to the rank of Mussulmans. The predilection for Judaism, however, strongly appears in the prominence given to the Jewish rite, in preference to the spiritual Christian Sacrament, which Mahometanism but too willingly lays aside, to return to the carnal letter of the law."—*Foster's Mahometanism Unveiled*, I. 404, 405.

[1] Exod. xii. 48.

[2] "At the period of its institution, Isaac and Ishmael equally

Very cheerfully did the friend of God obey the injunction of his Almighty portion. Very gladly did the father of the faithful instate his son into that rich heritage, whereof his own portion was so large, so happy, and so secure. Very joyfully did parental love overlook the petty suffering, to be thus undergone by his child; knowing that the light affliction, which was but for a moment, would be connected and overpaid, by faith, with a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Oh, it were well,—it would unfold a wide horizon of joyful hope to the straining eye of parental love, in the bonds of the gospel, if there were a general imitation of Abraham's faith among us,—if we would submit our children, I say not only to the milder yoke of baptismal obligation, but to whatever discipline of mind and conversation might lead them by the work of the Holy Spirit,

received circumcision, as the seal of their respective covenants: and so permanent was its transmission in both families, that in the time of Josephus, after the lapse of nearly two thousand years, the sign of circumcision remained *nationally* in use among the Jews and the Arabians: the one people administering the rite on the eighth day after the birth, in commemoration of the circumcision of Isaac; the other in the thirteenth year, in memory (as the Jewish historian testifies) of the circumcision of Ishmael, their father."—*Foster's Mahometanism Unveiled*, Vol. i. pp. 136, 137.

to choose God in the Person and mercies of his Son, as their portion. They would thus be enabled to reckon, that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in them.

Isaac, was the first fruit of infant dedication to God. How great hath been, since Isaac's day, the harvest of souls to Jehovah, in the Jewish and the Gentile Church, by circumcision, and by Baptism! What shall be the mighty abundance of that harvest, to the ceaseless praise and honour of redeeming love, when the angelic reapers shall appear, with the Son of Man, in his glory, for its in-gathering at the end of the world; when parents and children—that which to the eye of sense appeared mature and immature for the sickle,—the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear, shall be collected in one vast sheaf of redeemed man, for the garners of unchanging blessedness! Christian parents, who have in faith, by the Saviour's own ordinance of Baptism, thus given your children into the refuge of the covenant, and into the open arms of its Administrator's everlasting mercy, pray for that day, in faith, wait for it, in the full assurance of faith; and expect it, in the joy of that hope, which maketh not

ashamed. Did the firm belief of Abraham, lay hold of the divine promises in favour of his child? and as he saw the blood of circumcision flow from Isaac, was not a well-spring of rapturous hope unsealed, concerning his high destiny as one of the household of God? And shall not the same tide of the same hope, yet clearer, brighter, fuller, and more transporting, rise within you, as water from the rock in Horeb, smitten by the prophet's rod, when you see your children baptized for new life, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost?

On the other hand, if Abraham had refused to do the bidding of God, by the circumcision of his son, on the eighth day, would he not have rejected the covenant, daringly and presumptuously rejected it, and thus have turned aside the stream of mercy; leaving Isaac, the son of his old age, the son of his love, the son of God's promise, in the drought and barrenness, the misery and wretchedness, of an uncovenanted state, without hope, without Christ, and without God in the world?

God therefore, whose name is Love, and all whose dealings exhibit the tenderness of that love, was pleased to choose the children with

their parents professing faith in Him ; to regard them as holy on account of that relation ; and thus to demand their infant devotion to Him, by solemn initiation into his Church. The children of heathen were incapable of this great privilege, otherwise than by adoption ; because they had not been called, and chosen, and separated of God, to the knowledge of his true salvation. Thus moreover, these infants were regarded as believers, although by reason of their tender age they could make no personal profession of their faith. Abraham acknowledged his faith, by believing on Him who justifieth the ungodly, before he was circumcised. Isaac, on the other hand, the very next link in this gemmed and golden chain of promise, was circumcised, before he professed, or could profess, his faith in the world's Saviour ; because, if he lived, he was as effectually bound to profess it, as any adult proselyte was to continue in that belief which he had solemnly declared in the face of the Church, and in the presence of its glorified Head.[1] And I pray you to bear in

[1] Cases to recover Dissenters, p. 324. If children are incapable of entering into covenant with God, as some imagine, before they are taught the privileges and duties of that sacred relation, and are arrived at years fully to understand them, why was Isaac, why

memory this portion of our argument; because it is the answer to a thousand misrepresentations or misunderstandings concerning the right of the infant children of parents, professing the faith of Christ crucified, to the Sacrament of Baptism: and to all the blessings of that most wisely and graciously-ordained seal of salvation.

It was meet and right also, that circumcision should not only be allowed, but commanded to infants: because of those three deep and solemn truths of religion which it symbolically taught,—the state of man by nature, as a subject of the curse, and an heir of wrath; the necessity of redemption by blood-shedding; and the unrepealable obligation of being born again, by the Holy Spirit, into the kingdom of God. In each of these respects it answers to the rite of Baptism, under the new dispensation of the grace of God, except as the former had a *prefigurative* relation to the Redemption price, not yet paid; and as the latter has a *commemorative* relation to the Redemption

was every descendant of Abraham, and every member of his family, born in it, or bought into it, ordered to receive the seal of covenant initiation, at eight days old, and when by reason of their tender age they must needfully be ignorant of that salvation, in which they were yet called to participate?

already accomplished. Circumcision taught, that without shedding of blood there could be no remission:—Baptism teaches, that the atoning blood having been shed, the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit, whereof water is the emblem, and whereof the application by Christ's commandment is needful, has been effectually secured by that redemption price.

I say, that circumcision symbolized the natural estate of man,[1] as born into the world the heir of guilt and pollution. "*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" By the prescription of the age, at which it was to be performed, and by the very nature of the rite itself, it taught, in lines

[1] See Ainsworth on the Pentateuch, p. 69. The Sacraments, especially those of initiation, whether under the Old or New Testament, have respect both to the removal of our guilt, and to the change of our nature. Why should infant or man be circumcised by divine appointment, but to let us understand the propagation of corruption, and derivation of it from man to his posterity? Why should water be appointed, which is of cleansing efficacy, but to let us know that there is uncleanness to be removed? As sacrifices for atonement implied wrath, so this cleansing implied pollution, and therefore guilt? Why is the sign and seal applied by another hand, except to show us, that the blessings conveyed are derived to us from sources beyond our own power to reach—that the blood of Christ removes the guilt, and the Spirit of Christ obliterates the stain?—*Blake on the Covenants*, p. 368.

of most significant light and truth the universality of original sin. It moreover had a prefigurative relation to the Incarnation of the promised Seed, who was to atone for that wide spread, and otherwise hopeless pollution, by his most precious bloodshedding; and whose sufferings were sacramentally acknowledged and pleaded by the performance of this most significant rite. It connected the native guilt of man, with the doctrine taught from the beginning—taught I doubt not to our fallen parents in paradise, when mercy in Jesus smoothed the frown upon the face of God, that without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sins. And it further taught, although unlike Baptism, it had no promise of conveying, the necessity of a new birth, called the circumcision of the heart.[1] This, says an eminent writer,[2] was probably the meaning of the ancient Jewish doctors, in asserting that when any man becomes a proselyte, he is like a new-born child. Hence, on the ground of this prevalent idea, our Lord so justly retorts on Nicodemus for his ignorance, "*Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?*" These sages, in their

[1] See Biddulph's Theology of the Early Patriarchs, II. 126.
[2] Witsius on the Covenants.

triflings with divine truth, and their distortions of its simplicity, taught, that a new soul which came under the wings of the divine majesty, and was received into the embraces of the Supreme Being, dropt down, in its purity and beauty, from some heavenly palace, on him who was circumcised. By these dark and mysterious expressions they probably described that spiritual regeneration, which subsequent unbelief, being unable to comprehend, disregarded as a mere empty sound; but of which circumcision was the sign and seal.

All who were embraced by the mercies of the Abrahamic covenant, with the bright and beaming catalogue of its spiritual blessings, ought, in mere consistency, to receive the initial sign. But infants, as the example of Isaac, and all the descendants of Abraham, whether by wives or concubines, undeniably proves, were so embraced: therefore, they ought, by needful and irrefragable consequence, to receive the initial sign and seal of these mercies—that is circumcision. Is the case otherwise under the gospel, with the exception of an alteration in that sign and seal, of which we shall speak hereafter? Suppose it so, for the argument of a moment, and what follows?

Surely that children under that inestimably precious promulgation of glory to God in the highest, and of good will to men, are far, exceedingly far more disadvantageously circumstanced, than were the children of believers under the patriarchal dispensation, and through every age of redemption in the Jewish Church, before the advent of its Almighty Head in the flesh.[1] And yet we are told[1] that "*God hath provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*"[2]

[1] "Christ confirmed the covenant made unto the fathers. He bettered it, and no way worsted it. And when He commanded a new seal to be set, instead of circumcision, He did it without altering the substance of the covenant in the least degree. But now, the very substance of the covenant would be altered for the worse, if some persons, formerly received into grace, should by Christ be excluded. Yea, and believer's children are in a worse condition than in the Jewish Church; which to affirm, were not only derogatory to Christ's grace, but against scripture itself, which saith, (Eph. iii. 6.) that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews, and of the same body, and partakers of his promises in the Gospel; of which they are not partakers, nor fellow heirs, if so great a part of the Gentiles as their children should be excluded. The infants of Jews and proselytes, at the coming of Christ, had interest and right to the covenant of grace. If that right be taken away, then their condition after Christ is worse than before. Shall they be losers by becoming Christians? God's grace is not straitened by Christ's coming; therefore our infants are not excluded."—*Lyford's Apology*, p. 46. See also Thomas Watson's "Body of Divinity," p. 409. See also "Calvini Institut. Lib. IV. cap. xvi. sect. 5.

[2] Heb. xi. ult.

Nay, under that dispensation, when any Gentile became a proselyte to the religion of the God of Abraham, his children were always circumcised without delay, if their parent desired it; being understood as elected and called of God in that parent. And shall there be less liberty, less privilege, less blessedness to the offspring of professing believers, when the gates of gospel mercy are thrown so widely open; and in defiance as it were of the mind of Him who said as He laid his hand, and opened his heart of love upon infants and blessed them, "*Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.*" It was the wish of those who brought these little ones, that Jesus should lay his hands upon them and pray. He did so, notwithstanding the carnal reasonings of his disciples; and by this most significant act of love He admitted infants to an outward sign of blessing; although it was abundantly manifest, that they were incapable of comprehending what was done unto them, or said, or prayed concerning them. I argue therefore from this practice of our Lord, (and who will dare to doubt its conformity with the mind and truth of God whose fulness dwelt bodily in Him,) that infants are

not excluded from the kingdom of heaven, nor from the grace of the glorious gospel of the blessed God; and consequently, that no man hath a right to exclude them from the outward sign of admission into that kingdom. And if He did esteem it a full and sufficient reason, why little children should be admitted to the outward sign of a blessing, as well as to its substance, because of such is the kingdom of God; then by the same reason infants must be admitted to Baptism, and not debarred from the first entry into the kingdom of Christ; because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, before they are possessed of actual faith in God. [1]

That infants were capable of entering into covenant with God, through the medium of their parents, under the Jewish law, is undeniably argued from the express bidding of Jehovah. [2] "*Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God—your little ones, your wives, and the stranger that is in thy camp—that thou shouldst enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath which the Lord*

[1] See Lyford's Apology for Public Ministry and Infant Baptism, pp. 41, 42. See also Calvin's Institutes, Book IV. chap. xvi. Sect. 7.

[2] Deut. xxix. 10.

thy God maketh with thee this day, that He may establish thee this day for a people unto Himself, and that He may be unto thee a God, as He hath said unto thee, and as He hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Thus also we find the keeping of the sanctuary committed to the Kohathites, from a month old and upwards. Why was this? Surely not because these helpless infants could either know the solemn responsibility of their sacred charge, or could be gifted with strength and wisdom to fulfil it: but simply, because their fathers did actually keep it, engaged that their children should keep it when they arrived at maturity of years to be the warders of Jehovah's presence-chamber; and became pledged to train them up for this honour and duty, among the thousands of the camp of Israel. In like manner the great Prophet and Priest of the Church, who took on Himself the seed of Abraham, not only healed many adult petitioners for his mercy, because of their own faith, but extended the demonstrations of health-giving power and love to many children, on account of the faith of parents or of those who brought them beneath his eye, and besought Him for them—thus imputing, as it were, the faith of the peti-

tioners, as the faith of those, in whose behalf they prayed for the exercise of his goodness and grace.[1]

I have thus endeavoured to state the preliminary argument for the fitness of Infant Baptism, so far as it may be connected with, and authorized by the Old Testament Sacrament of circumcision, by exhibiting the evangelical nature of the Abrahamic covenant, and the capacity of infants to partake the sign and seal of it, which the unerring wisdom of God appointed. I may have appeared less practical, less immediately dealing with the heart and conscience, less strenuously, instantly, and urgently preaching the whole counsel of God, repentance towards Him, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, than is my duty, my wish, or my wont. But if I shall succeed in making good my positions—if I shall be enabled to shew the scriptural authority for Infant Baptism—the mighty magnitude of privilege and blessedness which it exhibits to the eye of faith—the happy repose whereto it invites a parent's heart, trembling with Christian solicitude for the spiritual interests of a dear child,

[1] See Cases to recover Dissenters, p. 326.

as it unfolds the rich and steadfast promises of God in Christ Jesus, then will the subject appeal to Christian parents, and to Christian sponsors, as with a message from the Most High, concerning every little one, the fruit of their bodies, or the object of their suretyship at the baptismal font—and to every one whom Divine Providence hath invested with the guardianship of a lamb of the Redeemer's fold, in the words of Pharaoh's daughter to the mother of Moses, but with the authority and promise of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in Jesus Christ, "*Take this child away, and nurse it for Me, and I will give thee thy wages.*"[1]

[1] Exod. ii. 9.

SERMON XXVII.

ARGUMENTS FOR INFANT BAPTISM.

(PART II.)

MATTHEW XXVIII. 20.

JESUS CAME AND SPAKE UNTO THEM, SAYING, ALL POWER IS GIVEN UNTO ME IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH. GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST: TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU; AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAY, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD. AMEN.

THE preceding discourse explained a Scripture, recording the obedience of Abraham to the divine command for marking his son's flesh with circumcision, as the sign and seal of a gracious covenant with him, and with his seed after him. The passage now quoted, describes a similar injunction given by the Incarnate Word, as the last expression of his will upon earth, to make disciples to the faith of his sal-

vation, and to give them an outward visible sign and seal of the grace of that salvation, as it had been purchased by his passion on the cross.

One of the articles of our Church,[1] vindicating the perfect harmony between the various portions of the word of God, declares, that "the Old Testament is not contrary to the New, for both in the Old and New Testament, everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man." Salvation from sin, and the manifestation of Jehovah's glory in it, are the common subjects of both. The Old Testament exhibits a plan, outline, and framework; the New Testament displays a finished building: one shewing us the tabernacle in the wilderness, the other directing us, in admiration and love, to the splendour and magnificence of the Lord's temple upon Mount Sion. "The Old Testament verifies the New, and the New illustrates the Old. The Old shews the promises of God, and the New their performance. By comparing both together, the wisdom of God in his conduct is cleared, and the truth of God in his word confirmed.

[1] Article VII.

The Old Testament delivers the types, and the New interprets them. The Old Testament presents them, like jewels in a casket; the New opens it, spreads them forth, and discovers their value. The Israelites in the Old felt the weight, while they were taught the significance of the ceremonies; believers in the New enjoy their preciousness." [1]

One object of the last discourse was to shew, that the covenant made by God with Abraham, as a federal head, and the representative of a spiritual seed, was, in very truth and substance, the same with that, whereof God in Christ Jesus was the Mediator: and that ever since God called the family of Abraham, and settled his visible Church in it, He hath never suffered that Church to fail. It was an everlasting covenant, made by Jehovah, to be Abraham's God, and the God of his seed; that he might be the father both of Jews and Gentiles who believe. The Jewish and the Christian Church then, are one, in continued succession, though under different administrations and ordinances. The same spiritual promises and blessings which belonged to the Church under the Old Testa-

[1] Charnock II. 539.

ment, belong also to it under the New.[1] The Jewish Church forms the natural branches: the Gentiles are engrafted into the same stock, into the same true vine, Jesus Christ, the Head of dignity, and the Head of influence to both.

The other object of the last discourse was to shew that circumcision, the door of entrance into this covenant, framed by eternal wisdom, was thrown open to infants, as well as to those of riper years. That circumcision was in general a sign and seal, both of outward privileges, and of spiritual blessings.[2] It was not only a sign and seal of the possession of Canaan, but of the righteousness of faith. It was not only a sign and seal of the covenant of Sinai, but of the covenant of grace to lost and perishing man.

If these two points were established, we are in a position to consider—

III. That infants are capable of an initial seal of the covenant in the Church of Christ.

The text itself is decisive, as to the general necessity of its application, being the command of Him, who having discharged his priestly office of Atonement upon the cross, hath now

[1] Acts ii. 39. 2 Cor. i. 20. Rom. xi. 16, 17.
[2] Rom. iv. 11.

all power both in heaven and earth committed unto Him; who speaks therefore with an authority, from which there is no appeal; by a word which shall judge men in the last day; and whereby a fearful sentence is passed upon those who deny the efficacy, and therefore the necessity of his gracious ordinances. 'If Christ Himself,' saith Hooker, 'which giveth salvation, do require Baptism, it is not for us that look for salvation, to sound and examine Him, whether unbaptised man may be saved: but seriously to do that which is required, and religiously to fear the danger which may grow by the want thereof. Had Christ only declared his will, to have all men baptized, and not acquainted with any cause why Baptism is necessary, our ignorance in the reason of that He enjoineth, might perhaps have somewhat hindered the forwardness of our obedience thereunto. Whereas now, being taught that Baptism is necessary to take away sin, how have we the fear of God in our hearts, if care of delivering men's souls from sin do not move us to use all means for their Baptism.[1] Howso-

[1] Hooker's Eccl. Pol. Book v. Sect. 60. See also Sect 57. See also Bishop Taylor on Infant Baptism. Works II. 133. Edition 1836.

ever He, by the secret ways of his own incomprehensible mercy, may be thought to save without Baptism, this cleareth not the Church from guiltiness of blood, if through her superfluous scrupulosity, lets and impediments of less regard should cause a grace of so great moment to be withheld, wherein our merciless strictness may be our own harm, though not theirs, towards whom we shew it: and we, through the hardness of our hearts may perish, albeit they through God's unspeakable mercy do live.'

I deemed it fitting to say thus much upon the necessity of an initial Sacrament into the Christian covenant, at whatever age administered, because there are persons professing the gospel of Christ, professing allegiance to his sceptre, and reverence to his authority, who yet deny and exclude both Sacraments of his grace and love.[1] My argument however must be applied to the fitness of *Infant Baptism*.

When the gospel of life and mercy is newly brought to the hearing, and offered to the acceptance of men, who erewhile had sat in darkness, and the shadow of spiritual death, it

[1] This heresy of the Quakers is only a revival of that in the early church, which rejected the sacrament of Baptism. See Bingham's Origines Ecclesiasticæ, I. 460. Sect. I.

is obviously needful that they should be first taught, confess repentance and faith, and so be baptised as was the case with Abraham, who first believed God, and then received the sign and seal of that righteousness, which he had by faith. But as in his case, when circumcised, (having previously received and closed with the truth of God,) his children were taken into covenant, first circumcised and then taught, even so it is under the brighter mercies of the Christian dispensation, according to the natural consequences of the analogy of faith. And it is a sad error, whereby a mist of darkness and delusion is drawn over the minds of men, to suppose that the covenant of God's everlasting mercy in his Son, comprehends only *actual believers*, who can understand the law of the covenant, and make profession of their faith. This no doubt must be a part of the covenant, but assuredly not its whole extent. By title deeds we purchase and convey lands, to be held in lease or copyhold to our children, who shall be born hereafter, as well as to those already born. And although our children, at that age of mental and moral unconsciousness, knew not what their fathers did for them, yet when they come of age, they claim these lands, by virtue

of the landlord's grant and seal annexed, paying the rent, and doing the covenant suit and service. Even so doth the great and gracious Landlord of heaven and earth, put both us and our children into the copyhold of salvation, confirming it by the seal of Baptism. And when our children come of age to know the mercies of their high inheritance, they may in Christ Jesus, their Head and Surety, claim the good things, and all the exceeding great and precious promises of New Testament life and love, in virtue of God's covenant made to them, through their fathers, and through the Church of their fathers, as surely as they are bound to perform the conditions of their father's covenant on their behalf.

Infants are capable of the thing signified in Baptism, that is, the blood of sprinkling, and the purification of the Holy Spirit, and therefore they have no incapacity for the sacramental sign and seal of those treasures of unimaginable mercy. Infants are capable of grace, therefore they are in a condition to receive its seal. For if they may be saved, eternally saved in Christ Jesus, that capacity is unquestionable. "But of such is the kingdom of God:" therefore that kingdom in grace, and glory, (for the two can-

not be separated) that is, a present and a final salvation, may, upon the sure warrant of eternal truth belong to them. Who then can forbid, that its seal should be applied to them?[1] We know from Christ's own mouth, that infants may

[1] *Watson's Body of Divinity, folio*, p. 410.—"The Lord Jesus, minding to shew a token, whereby the world might understand that He was come rather to enlarge than to limit the mercy of God, gently embraced children offered unto Him, rebuking the disciples which went about to forbid them to come to Him, forasmuch as they did lead those, to whom the kingdom of heaven belongeth, away from Him, by whom alone the entry is open into heaven. But, will some man say, what like thing hath Baptism with this embracing of Christ? But let us weigh the doings of Christ somewhat more heedfully than such kind of men do. For neither is this to be lightly passed over, that Christ commandeth infants to be brought unto Him, adding a reason why, "because of such is the kingdom of heaven." If it be meet that infants be brought to Christ, why is it not also meet that they be received to Baptism, the sign of our communion and fellowship with Christ? If the kingdom of heaven be theirs, why should the sign be denied them, whereby there is, as it were, an entry opened into the Church, that being admitted into it, they may be numbered among the heirs of the heavenly kingdom? How unjust shall we be, if we drive away them whom Christ calleth unto Him! If we spoil them whom He garnisheth with his gifts! If we shut out them whom He willingly receiveth! But if we will examine how much that which Christ there did, differeth from Baptism, yet of how much greater price shall we have Baptism, (whereby we testify that infants are contained in the covenant of God,) than receiving, embracing, laying on of hands, and prayer, whereby Christ Himself being present, declareth that they are both his, and are sanctified of Him!"—*Calvin's Institution of Religion, translated by Thomas Norton*, 1578, pp. 554, 555.

be blessed, for He did Himself bless them. Shall we deny the ample virtue of that most efficacious benediction, because we know not the manner of its operation? As well might we deny them the reasoning powers, because we cannot discern those powers in exercise. Shall we deny them to be sinners, because they know not the law, nor the nature of its violation? What then meant that Scripture which declared that "*death reigned even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression?*"[1] Or need we, like the men of Sodom in their blindness, wearying themselves to find the door of Lot's house, go about to understand the manner in which the Righteousness of Christ is applied to them, seeing God is as *gracious* in imputing to them the Righteousness of the second Adam, as He was *just* in imputing to them the sin and condemnation of the first?

If then the nature of circumcision, considered as a Sacrament, was the same within its limits under the Law, as Baptism under the Gospel, it must follow that children, under the Christian, are in the same capacity to receive an

[1] Rom. v. 14.

initiatory Sacrament, as those under the Abrahamic dispensation, provided they are excluded by no new command, issued upon competent, that is upon divine authority. If membership with the Church, and the act of initiation were no *patriarchal*, or *legal* absurdities, they can be no *evangelical* absurdities. Those whom God hath sanctified, and adopted, and made members of his Church, let no man presume to think incapable of its precious privileges. Yet so rash have been the adversaries of Infant Baptism, as to pronounce those to whom we deem it our solemn duty, that the Sacrament should be imparted, as incapable of receiving it, as the young ones of unreasonable creatures: nay, that it is no less vain, no less impious to pray, that God would pour forth his Holy Spirit upon them, than that He should illuminate and sanctify a stone or a tree.

Let it be granted that infants are incapable of some of the immediate ends and uses for which Baptism was ordained. The same argument, whereby upon this ground they should be excluded, might be pleaded against many who are joined together in the holy ordinance of matrimony. But I go further, and add, that it would be a valid argument against the cir-

cumcision and the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ. He could not possibly answer all the ends of either Sacrament. There was no need of blood to typify the sacrifice for sin on his behalf—there was no pollution of the flesh to put away, there was no remission of sins to be sealed. The Baptism of John, who performed that rite upon our Lord, was the Baptism of repentance; but the Lamb of God who knew no sin, could need no repentance: yet thus it became Him to fulfil all righteousness. The same objections therefore, which may be conjured up by the perverseness of a disputatious, or the bewilderings of a scrupulous spirit against Infant Baptism, have equal force against Infant Circumcision; although it was the express ordinance and appointment of God Himself, even as Baptism was afterwards enjoined by the personal incarnation of the Eternal Son, who is very God, and, having assumed our nature, as God and man, is one Christ.

St. Paul, adducing a reason why the woman who hath an [1] unbelieving husband should not leave him, if he be pleased to dwell with her, implies the right of children within the Chris-

[1] See Townson on the Sacraments, p. 114 et seq.

tian covenant to the blessing conveyed by it, and therefore to the initial Sacrament of those blessings. "*The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.*"[1] Surely not holy by natural birth and generation—for such an assumption would be in irreconcileable opposition to his whole doctrine of man's innate and entire depravity. He rather speaks of a covenant holiness, and so of a title to the privileges of that covenant. The child of a Christian parent brings with it into the world nothing but the corruption of our fallen nature, and the divine promises of the Gospel by Baptism. So that St. Paul, speaking the mind of Christ by his apostolical authority and commission, attributes a holiness to the children of believing parents, whereby they are more capable of Baptism than the offspring of unbelieving parents. And of the holiness whence this capacity is derived, all children, born within the sacred pale of Christianity, within the visible Church of the living God, are partakers, although, (as we have seen) only

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 14.

one of their parents should believe. Shall the privilege be less when *both* profess the faith of Christ, when *both* are reputed holy, through fellowship with the Redeemer's Church by Baptism? For even the holiness which was derived to them, relatively from their parents, before they were baptized, or whereby they became capable of Baptism, was conferred upon their parents in that Sacrament.[1] In the same manner, the Jewish people, the branches, were holy, because the root (the patriarchs for whose sake they were beloved) was holy.[2] Thus scripturally also affirms our own judicious Hooker.[3] "God, by covenant, requireth in the elder sort faith and Baptism; in children, the Sacrament of Baptism alone, whereunto He hath also given them right by special privilege of birth within the bosom of the holy Church."[4]

[1] See Jackson's Works, III. 470, 471. [2] Rom. xi. 16, 28.
[3] Book V. Sect. 60.

[4] In virtue of this derived holiness, this inherited holiness of faith it is, that a creature born in sin, whom God could not look upon in itself, but must for ever abhor, becomes capable of being taken within the holy bond of the blessed Covenant; and of having performed upon it the utmost efficacy of the work of the Holy Spirit, which is signified therein. And the child thus admitted, is as truly a member of the Church of Christ, as the eldest saint upon the earth; because the Holy Spirit is as free and as powerful to work his work upon the babe or the child unborn, from the first

It is among those radiant truths, which occupy the eye of faith, and are its most attractive resting-places, amidst all the bright constellations of love wherewith the Bible abounds, that God manifest in the flesh, "*loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.*"[1] From this scripture it may be thus argued;—Those for whom He so offered up Himself, that they might be saved, He likewise intends to bring to salvation, by sanctifying and cleansing them, with the washing of baptismal water. But He gave Himself likewise for infants, that they might be saved; and therefore, infants are ordinarily to be cleansed with the washing of baptismal water, a purification which many who die in earliest life could otherwise never enjoy.[2]

I must not omit to notice, what appears to me a very powerful argument for Infant Baptism, arising from the solemn command of

moment of conception, as He is to work his work on the hoary sinner, who, instead of having any advantage, hath verily the disadvantage if so it may be called, of years of sinfulness and prodigality.—*Irving on Baptism*, p. 211.

[1] Eph. v. 26.

[2] Bp. Hopkins' Doctrine of the Two Sacraments, II. 406.

the ascending Saviour, rightly interpreted and understood. "Go ye therefore and make all nations disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The words in the original, plainly have this signification, and so they ought to be translated. Our own, and other European versions indeed, render the words, "Go ye and *teach* all nations;" whereby the first occasion was given to the enemies of Infant Baptism. For it being imagined by those who understood not the sacred text in its original dress, that our Lord enjoined all nations, first to be taught and then baptized, they concluded that none ought to partake of this Sacrament, until they had been fully instructed in the principles of the oracles of Christ. But the original word which we render "teach," rather means, "make all nations followers of my faith, disciples to the truth and blessedness of my salvation." [1] It is thus constantly translated in the oriental versions; and therefore perhaps the sect of anti-pædo baptists never took root in the Churches of the east. Upon this ground, our Lord is so far from requiring, as a necessary prelude to

[1] See Matt. xxvii. 57; xiii. 52. Acts xiv. 21. John iv. 1.

Baptism, that children should be first taught, that He requires rather the Sacrament to precede, and the instruction to follow.[1]

The sin of parents has been often urged, as a reason against the admission of their children to the ordinance of Baptism,—the door of entrance into covenant blessings. But surely without good reason. Under the Law, the mother who had borne a man child, was to be regarded as polluted during thirty three days; was permitted to touch no hallowed thing; was commanded to abstain from approaching the sanctuary, until the days of her purification were ended. Nothing however is mentioned in that law concerning the child's uncleanness. It was to be circumcised on the eighth day, and no word is spoken, either of its pollution or purification. They therefore, who can find no let or hindrance in the child to Baptism, but seek one in the parent, to wrong its deep need of this initiatory Sacrament, may thus learn, that while the parent was personally polluted, the child was regarded pure and unspotted, save by the condemning stain of its original

[1] Bp. Beveridge's Works, III. 331, Edit. 1709. Hyde, Christ and his Church, pp. 213, 214.

taint and corruption; of which, circumcision signed and sealed the removal. When the parent might touch no hallowed thing, the child was yet laid under the obligation of infinite love, by a most imperative command, to enjoy the gracious though painful rite of circumcision. In like manner, moral uncleanness in the parent can have no more influence on the child, to bar a similar privilege, than legal pollution; because according to that view, original sin, although transfused by the parent into the child, is no hindrance.

In Regeneration, whereof we will at present simply regard Baptism as the sign and seal, (albeit, I am persuaded that it extends much beyond such limit,—even to an ample spiritual signification and conveyance,) man is merely passive: whence also no outward act is required of one, who was to be circumcised, or baptized, as there is in other Sacraments, but only passively to receive it. Infants therefore, by plain and necessary consequence, are as capable of receiving the Sacrament of Baptism, in this respect, as adults themselves can be.

Where the promise of life, through grace, is given, there the seal of that promise, the very pledge, as it were, of its validity may

surely be appended. But that promise was given, and a strenuous appeal founded upon it to the hearts and consciences of the Jews,—the very people, the adults at least among them, who by wicked hands had crucified and slain the Lord of glory. "*When they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then said Peter unto them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*"[1] But, (retorts the objector,) this scripture pleads hardly against infant Baptism, because repentance, of which they are incapable, is demanded. Nay, but with what cogent reason doth the Apostle press Baptism upon them: surely, by the universality of the promise, and of the blessings which it involved. "*The promise is unto you, and unto your children, and to all that are afar off; even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*" The promise was to their *children* not less than to *themselves;* and therefore their children were equally entitled to the seal of that promise. If they asked, how this

[1] Acts ii. 37, 38.

gracious engagement on the part of God was to be conveyed to their children? the answer has been already given,—"Repent and be baptized." They who were conscious of actual sin, were commanded to exercise penitence and broken heartedness: they who had only,—only did I say, alas, it is in itself a dreadful and a crushing weight,—but they who had simply, the guilt of original sin, were to have it washed away in the laver of Baptism: and those first motions of life in their hearts, were to be followed by increase of light, joy, assurance, and holiness.

That this argument may not be thought of human imagining, we may observe, that it is used by the same apostle in terms the most express. In the case of Cornelius and his family, he justified his proceeding on this very ground. "Shall we deny Baptism to them who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" As though he had said, They who are capable of the same grace, are entitled to the same sign: but infants are capable of the same grace—that is of the Holy Ghost, (for the promise, the eternal Comforter, the sum and substance of New Testament promise, is to our children, as well as to ourselves,) and therefore they are

entitled to its sign and seal in the Sacrament of Baptism.

I have hinted in the preceding discourse that if Jehovah entered into a covenant with the Jews, which actually involved their children, giving them a sign of its truth, permanency, and appendant promise, He does not so much love the Church, as He did the synagogue, if there be no covenant made with the children of Christian parents. Or, if He hath made such covenant, and yet the seal of it be not allowed to our little ones—that is, unless they are to be baptized, and entitled to the promises of the spiritual covenant of the New Testament in the blood of Christ, as were the Jewish babes in their more dark and shadowy refuge of mercy by circumcision, then this grace, though it may belong to our infant offspring, is most mournfully secret, undeclared, unsigned, and unsealed. And oh what a bereavement of parental comfort is involved in the absence of the broad seal of this Sacrament to parental faith! How sad and darkening the want of that mercy, in outward testimony, which gave the father of the faithful and his believing posterity so much comfort and assurance; and which is not less necessary to the Christian solicitudes of parental love, than

it was to the heart of Abraham for his son![1]

We have seen that when the all-sufficient God first gave his covenant to Abraham, He gave withal a commandment, that its sign should be impressed upon the flesh of all whom its wide circumference of mercy might embrace.[2] When the Lord our Righteousness, renewed and established that covenant, in his own blood, though He changed the sign, He repealed not the command. Nay He added a *new* commandment, enjoining the new sign,—Baptism, without exception of any who had been formerly received into covenant. So that we are under a two-fold commandment to baptize our infants —one, of God who first made the covenant, and gave the commandment, which is still so strongly and surely in force, that if Christ the Lord of his household the Church had not changed it, we were all bound at this day to undergo circumcision; and one, of Christ, who hath changed the sign but not the covenant nor the commandment; and who hath therefore bound it upon the obedience of all who are not excepted out of the covenant; that is, (so far as things

[1] Bishop Taylor, II. 389.

[2] Gen. xv. 10—14.

revealed tell us,) upon all who dwell within that City of Refuge, the visible Church of Jesus Christ.

Let it be for a moment imagined that the glorious Head of the Church had intended to form one entirely from among the Gentiles, according to the Old Testament usage. What other direction could have been needed, than simply to give a charge to his Apostles, "Go ye and proselyte all nations, circumcising and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Could his intentions have been more emphatically expressed to men, who being Jews, must have had the same apprehension as to the subjects of initiation under the Gospel, as they had entertained under the Law? They had lived under a dispensation where infants were admitted into the Church both by Circumcision and Baptism.[1] And unless they had been instructed to the contrary, they must naturally, and indeed necessarily, have understood their commission to baptize, as extending to infants equally with actual believers. What is the

[1] See proof of this in Wall on Infant Baptism, Introduction to Part I.

message to those men of God, the missionaries, who are at this day holding up the banner of the cross, and carrying the light of divine love, in the Lamb of God, to the benighted realms of impurity and blood, in heathen superstition? "Go ye and baptize all nations." Could one among them possibly imagine, that infants were excepted out of his commission, coming from a land where Infant Baptism had been a constant and universal practice of his Church, knowing it so to be, and having himself, like all around him, undergone the rite?

I will press the argument no farther. Enough has surely been advanced to shew, that, as Infant Circumcision was God's ordinance, in the Abrahamic Dispensation, so is an equivalent rite, that of Baptism, the equal ordinance of the same God, speaking to us by his Son, in the open and unveiled covenant of his love. So decided indeed was the view of it taken in the early Church, that an answer is yet on record made by a convocation of sixty-six bishops summoned by St. Cyprian, about an hundred and fifty years after the apostolic era, to answer the scruples of Fidus an African bishop, who desired to know whether it was rightly permitted him to allow the Baptism of

infants before the eighth day after their birth, [1] seeing that period had been so plainly stamped with the signet of divine authority, for the administration of Circumcision, under the Jewish dispensation. The conclusion was unanimous, that infants were admissible to this ordinance, from the first day of their birth.

I shall hereafter endeavour to shew reasons why Circumcision gave way to Baptism, under the Christian dispensation. In the mean time, if it be an ordinance of God, a Sacrament of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, by the ministration of the Word made flesh, there is the loud and thrilling call of the Most High God equally upon Christian obedience, as upon parental love for infant dedication to Him by Baptism. And John, yet unborn, did not more surely leap in the womb of Elizabeth, at the salutation of her who bare the Lord of glory, than should every Christian parent's heart bound with joy and thankfulness at the command of God to baptize the babe of many supplications, many hopes, many solicitudes. "*For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked Him, there-*

[1] See Wall on Infant Baptism, Part I. pp. 44, &c. where the answer of Cyprian is given in length. Ed. 1705.

fore also I have lent him to the Lord, as long as he liveth, he shall be lent unto the Lord—(or as the marginal reading still more beautifully expresses the pious sentiment of this believing mother)—*therefore also he whom I have obtained by petition shall be lent unto the Lord.*"[1]

[1] 1 Sam. i. 27, 28.

SERMON XXVIII.

ARGUMENTS FOR INFANT BAPTISM.

(PART III.)

MATTHEW XXVIII. 19.

GO YE THEREFORE AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST.

THE train of argument, by which I have endeavoured to shew, that infants are capable of initiation into the covenant of mercy, made with sinners, in Jesus Christ for their salvation, is briefly this. At the first institution of Circumcision, Abraham, not as an *individual*, but as a *federal* head, was circumcised at ninety years old; and all the men of his household with him. In like manner, at the institution of Baptism under the Gospel, parents and masters of families, being adult believers, were first baptized.

After the Circumcision of Abraham, and the men of his family, their infant seed were also commanded to undergo the same rite; the promise, in its fullest extent of mercy, belonging as immediately and as entirely to them, as to their parents. Agreeably to this divine ordinance, whole families, infants included, of those who received the faith of Christ crucified under the brighter mercies of the Gospel dispensation, were admitted to Baptism; because they also had a direct and equal interest in the exceeding great and precious promises of God in Christ, made known to them by his preaching, and unchangeably sealed to them by his death. Independently of the argument from Acts ii. 35, we learn, that Cornelius, with his household and friends were baptized; Lydia and her household; the jailor of Philippi and his family; the household of Stephanus received the same sign of the covenant; and it can hardly be imagined that no infants or little children were among these communities of the early faithful. And once more, that as in the days of circumcision, when any stranger who had not undergone it became a proselyte of the Jewish Church, and wished to join himself to the Lord within its communion, he was to receive that

badge of his faith, at whatever period of life he might have arrived. Even so, in these last days, if an infidel shall be converted, he shall be baptized upon his personal profession of faith. I proceed then to offer,

IV. SOME REASONS WHY BAPTISM SHOULD SUPERSEDE CIRCUMCISION UNDER THE GOSPEL.

There are few among the faithful followers of our Lord, few who even in outward confession have taken upon themselves, the easy yoke and mild burden of his gracious law, who hesitate to receive the change of the Sabbath from the last to the first day of the week, in honour of that stupendous triumph of Almighty power, whereby, not the world, and man its tenant, heir and sovereign, were created, as at first, but whereby man's soul was raised from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and his body, sown in the corruption of the grave, was by the risen Saviour, as the first fruits of universal resurrection, raised incorruptible and glorious, from its prison-house of death and dissolution. Yet this change of sabbatical commemoration pleads no express command of the Lord of glory, but rests upon the known custom of his apostles; while the change of ordinance from Circumcision, stands upon the

supreme authority of his own injunction,—"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." No other sanction can be needed for the alteration, by those, in whose hearts there is a response to the Redeemer's unspeakable love.

The tender wisdom of the change, however, and its moral fitness to the altered circumstances, under which the Church was placed, are no less conspicuous than the supremacy of sovereignty, wherein it originated. He who came to form one Church, purchased by his blood, sanctified by his grace, and made meet for his glory,—resolved, in order to effect that blessed unity and brotherhood in the salvation of his grace, to break down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, to abolish the enmity of ordinances between them, that He might reconcile them into one body on the cross. Circumcision, next to sacrifice, which the oblation of the Lamb of God once offered, had for ever abolished, was the most prominent of these dividing ordinances; and therefore, there was an especial fitness in the institution of some other seal. And while the promises, wherein consisted the power of the signs re-

mained the same, the outward ceremony might well be changed. The Jews had become odious and ridiculous to all other nations, because of this rite. Had it therefore been continued by the Saviour, a stumbling block would have been cast into the way of men's conversion, whereof their great enemy would gladly have taken advantage, to make the faith of Christ crucified, with such a sign of its profession, both hateful and absurd to those Gentile nations, to whose ears the tidings of salvation were brought. The doctrine of the cross, under the most favourable circumstances of its preaching, would be to the Greeks foolishness. He therefore who knew the depths of prejudice in the carnal mind against the revelation of his grace in the *matter* to be proclaimed, resolved that there should be nothing to disgust in the *manner* of its promulgation. And well indeed for the peace and harmony of the Church would it have been, if the preachers of his gospel, and the undershepherds of his flock, had always exercised the same wise and salutary tenderness.

Circumcision was also a rite of such painful nature, that men would have shrunk from it, as Zipporah from the act of Moses: it was

therefore laid aside, as quite inconsistent with the first badge of that service which is perfect freedom: while Baptism was substituted, as an easy ceremonial, which pagans, (as paganism was nothing else than Judaism corrupted by the devil,) practised as well as the Jews; and therefore would be the more readily disposed to receive it.[1] In fact our blessed Lord only applied that which was amongst the most common, to the highest and most sacred use: so that the same element, whereby the body of the new-born infant is cleansed from the pollutions of the womb, should be applied to remove the pollutions of sin, and renew the soul to God.[2]

Circumcision was the seal of inheritance in the land of promise, and the badge of distinction between Abraham's posterity and all other nations; that so this visible sign might make them strive after the invisible grace which it sealed,—the rest that remaineth for the people of God,—and a walk of corresponding holiness. When therefore Jew and Gentile became one fold, when no peculiarity of clime or country was to be regarded, but there should be one Lord, one faith, one salvation,—when in every

[1] Cases to recover Dissenters, p. 329. [2] Ezek. xvi. 4, 9; xxxvi. 25.

nation he that feared God and wrought righteousness was to be accepted of Him, the badge of appropriation, the seal of a painful and odious singularity gave place to another badge, more simple and more suitable to its end of grace and general mercy.[1] The rite of Circumcision, is moreover abolished under the new testament of redeeming love, by the authority of the great Law-giver; because the blood of the covenant, whereof it was a memorial, and which it was designed to prefigure, has been shed upon the cross by the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. While the Jewish people therefore continue this rite, they declare in act, what in the dreadful obstinacy of their unbelief they constantly affirm, (and that with blasphemies of the name of Jesus,) that the blood of sprinkling has not been shed, nor the reconciliation made between guilty man, and his injured, dishonoured, holy God and Judge.

Circumcision was used, and blood shed in performing it, to keep in memory the atonement afterwards to be made by the surety of the covenant: even as sacrifices pointed out to the eye of faith, the blood of Jesus Christ which

[1] Lightfoot's Works, IV. 277.

cleanseth from all sin. Baptism, on the other hand, is an unbloody Sacrament, because the atonement prefigured by Circumcision has been made. The Almighty Head and Lawgiver of the Church therefore, has given another mode of initiation into its fold of spiritual grace and privilege, especially pointing to that sanctification which follows, when the blood of Christ is applied by faith to the soul.

St. Paul, beseeching his brethren of Colosse to stand fast in the simplicity of the Gospel, declares,[1] "that they were complete in Christ, who is the Head of all principality and power. He adds, "*In whom also ye are circumcised with the Circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ: buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.*" What means St. Paul by the circumcision of Christ? It is made without hands: it is therefore a supernatural and spiritual act. It is attended with the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, and therefore with deliverance from those burdensome ordinances of purification, which testi-

[1] Col. ii. 10—12.

fied of its uncleanness, the body of the flesh itself being put off. This supernatural and spiritual act therefore, called the Circumcision of Christ, removes that body of sin and death, whose presence the ceremonial law declared. And what is this act, whereof the virtue is so wonderful? Is it not Baptism, which is grammatically, as well as substantially, a part of the whole idea included under the Circumcision of Christ? Baptism then is here pointed out to us, as the name of the spiritual work: and washing with the water of Baptism is the act outward, intended to signify the act inward, done without hands, of putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. For what is a burial, if there be not first a death? And what is the death of a saint, but the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh? If therefore in Baptism we be buried with Him, as it is said, then in Baptism we die with him. If in Baptism we die, and are buried with Him, we are thenceforth regarded by the Spirit, as having suffered with Christ in the flesh: as being dead with Him unto the power of sin, yea, unto the power of death.[1]

[1] Irving on Baptism, p. 196. Davenant on Colos. i. 11, 12. Vol. II. 433, &c.

Circumcision then, is by no means necessary under the Gospel of the grace of God. But lest the outward sign, whereby the minds of believers in Jesus might be persuaded of their participation of spiritual benefits in Him, should be wanting, the apostle shews that Christians have a Sacrament still more express and excellent than Circumcision, the Sacrament of Baptism. This holy and significant rite was instituted by the command of God, through the ministry of our Lord's forerunner. The Incarnate Word sanctified and confirmed it, by receiving it at the Baptist's hand: and in his last act, He commanded it in his Church, even to the end of the world.

It would be an easy task to multiply reasons why He, whose love purchased the Church, and whose wisdom laid the platform of its constitution, should thus have superseded circumcision by Baptism. What have been brought forward, will however be probably thought sufficient. I proceed therefore

V. To answer some of the objections made against Infant Baptism.

It has been confidently asserted, and echoed in almost endless reverberations, by the enemies of this tender provision for the lambs of

the Redeemer's fold, that no express mention of infants is made in Scripture, as having been admitted to partake the rite of Christian initiation. I have already observed that the argument, if it had weight at all, is equally valid against the change of the sabbath. It may be added, that it would, if admitted to be of force, crush the doctrine of the Trinity, which cannot be found inculcated under that name throughout the whole extent of the word of God. But the Scriptures, on the other hand, are equally silent against deferring the Baptism of a Christian child, until it came to years of discretion. And surely if our Lord, in his capacity of legislator of the Church, hath repealed the privilege of infant initiation, it becomes those who deny it to them to show that repeal, which we are persuaded they can never do. The task of proof lies on them.

It may however be observed, that this silence, so far from being an objection to infant Baptism, is a strong confirmation of its authority. If infant initiation was commanded by God in Circumcision, and approved by Him in infant Baptism, which the Jewish Church added to infant Circumcision under the law, there is more reason why the disciples of our Lord

under the Gospel, should have looked for a positive and express abrogation of the practice, than for a direct command for its continuance. Commands usually precede practices before unknown. To justify the continuance of a rite already familiar to the experience of men, it is sufficient that it be not countermanded. The Jews who so fiercely persecuted the apostles, for abolishing the customs of the fathers, and turning the world upside down, never charged them with refusing to admit children into covenant, which they certainly would, if such had been the apostolic practice.[1] It surely follows

[1] There is indeed an instance apparently in contrariety to this statement. (See Acts xxi. 20, 21.) 'The Jewish Christians said unto Paul, "Thou seest brother, how many thousands of Jews there are that believe; and they are all zealous of the Law; and they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." To remove the prejudice, the great Apostle observed the prescribed rite of purification; and upon the same misprision had before circumcised Timothy. (Acts xvi. 3.) But when he found the Jews abusing this custom, to deduce from it a meritorious righteousness, utterly subversive of the glorious scheme of free salvation, by God who justifies the ungodly, in the Righteousness of his Son, he instantly and with uncompromising severity, protested against that awful perversion. "Behold, I Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of none effect unto

then, that if infants are not incapable of sacramental initiation into the covenant of salvation, nor expressly excluded from it by our Lord, in his capacity of Lawgiver to his Church,—if moreover, they had their share in this blessing of his grace, under the legal dispensation, they are allowed their portion in it under the Gospel; they have a claim, to which the hearts of those who love them in spiritual, not less than in natural bonds of affection, should gladly and gratefully respond. There is far greater reason to conclude, that our Lord would have prohibited infants from the laver of Regeneration in Baptism, if it had been his intention that they should not have been baptised, than that He should have commanded them to undergo this sign and seal of blessedness, if it had been his intention to continue the practice of infant Baptism. It was useless to command what the apostles would naturally have done, unless He had strictly prohibited them; and that prohibition He never gave, because He never, to say the least, uttered a word which could imply the exclusion of children. If on the other hand, infants had

you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." Gal. v. 2—5.

never received the seal of the covenant, it had been not merely expedient, but necessary to command, that it should be affixed to them, in token of their membership with the mystical body of Christ, and as the pledge of his favour. If on the contrary, He had intended to exclude them from a privilege long enjoyed, it must have been by a positive act, an act equally abhorrent from the yearning tenderness of his heart towards them, and from his mission, not to make void, but to fulfil the law.[1]

[1] See Hole on the Catechism, 4to. p. 489. 'It is urged by those who deny Infants' Baptism, that there is neither command for it, nor example in Scripture, as there was for infants' Circumcision. Now this consideration giveth one ready answer, if there were no other to be given. If Baptism, and baptizing of infants, had been as strange and unseen and unheard of a thing in the world, till John the Baptist came, as Circumcision was, till God appointed it to Abraham, there is no doubt, but there would have been a command or example expressly given, for the baptizing of infants, if indeed God would have them to be baptized, as there was for the circumcising of infants, because God would have them to be circumcised. But when the baptizing of infants had been a thing as commonly known, and as commonly used, long before John came, and to his very coming, as any holy thing that was used among the Jews, and they were as well acquainted with infants' Baptism as they were with infants' Circumcision, it doth not follow that there needed so express and punctual a command or example to be given for the baptizing of infants, which was well enough known already, as there needed for Circumcision of infants or others, which was a thing that till its institution had never been heard of or dreamed of in the world. . . . Baptism was no

They who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, but being without Christ, and without God in the world, were, as I have observed, to be taught the precious truths of salvation, and then baptized. But being thus admitted of the household of God, their children were also admitted upon the warrant of parental faith; and then taught the duties, privileges, glowing hopes, and everlasting blessings of the faith, whereinto they had been by Baptism instated, even as Abraham was first taught, then circumcised, while Isaac was first circumcised, and then taught to know Jehovah, and cling to the mercies of his salvation.

It has been argued, that Infant Baptism cannot be enforced from the Sacrament of Circumcision; because the latter was only a type

strange thing, when John came baptising; but the rite was known so well by every one, that nothing was better known than what Baptism was. And therefore there needed not such punctual and exact rules about the manner and object of it, as there had needed, if it had never been seen before. What needed it, in the Gospel, to tell that such or such persons were to be the objects of Baptism, when it was as well known before the Gospel began, that men, and women, and children, were the objects of Baptism, and were baptised, as it is to be known that the sun is up, when it shineth at noon-day?"—*Lightfoot. IV.* 409. *See also Lightfoot. Horæ Hebraicæ, on Matt. iii.*

of the former; and consequently not binding, when the substance was come, in the fully revealed salvation of the Gospel. But the case is otherwise. The blood of the legal sacrifices was indeed a shadow and representation of the blood of Christ, and of the absolute perfection, wherewith it purges the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God. The brazen serpent typified Him who was lifted up on the cross; and its virtue shadowed forth the Almighty efficacy of his atoning sacrifice. The deliverance of Noah and his family in the ark, was indeed a type of Baptism, as we learn from 1 Pet. iii. 21. The waters of the flood shadowed out this Sacrament, the ark being a type of the Church, and the waters through which it passed those of Baptism, in the ark of the Church. The pillar of fire and of cloud was a type of Baptism: and so was the water of sprinkling, wherein the ashes of the red heifer had been poured.[1] But the parallel of type

[1] See Thomas Jackson's Works, I. 519; III. 265. 'These things which we have spoken, both of mortification and washing, are shadowed out in the people of Israel, whom for the same cause the Apostle saith to have been baptized in the cloud and in the sea. Mortifying was figured, when the Lord, delivering them out of the hand of Pharaoh, and from cruel bondage, made for them a way through the Red Sea, and drowned Pharaoh him-

and antitype holds not between circumcision and Baptism; because the one has no symbolical likeness to the other. Is Baptism a Sacrament of initiation into the covenant of grace? So, as we have seen, was circumcision under the Law. Is Baptism a seal of the righteousness of faith? So was circumcision in the elder day of salvation. Doth Baptism confirm the covenant? So did circumcision. In these respects, Baptism does in the gospel day, what its elder sister circumcision did before the day star of that salvation arose upon our darkened

self, and the Egyptians their enemies, that followed them hard at their backs, and were even at their necks, to overtake them. For after the same manner also He promiseth to us in Baptism, and by a sign given, sheweth us, that we are by his power brought forth and delivered out of the thraldom of Egypt, that is to say, out of the bondage of sin: that our Pharaoh is drowned, that is to say, the devil, although even so he ceaseth not to exercise and weary us. In the cloud was a sign of cleansing. For as then the Lord covered the people with a cloud, cast over them, and gave them refreshing cold, lest they should faint and pine away with too cruel burning of the sun; so in Baptism, we acknowledge ourselves covered and defended with the blood of Christ, lest the severity of God, which is indeed an intolerable flame, should be upon us. But although this mystery was dark, and known only to few, yet because there is none other way to obtain Salvation, but in these two graces, (mortification and washing) God would not take away the sign of them both, from the old fathers, whom He had adopted to be heirs.'—*Calvin's Institutes by Norton*, 1578.

world, besides confirming faith, and increasing grace by virtue of prayer unto God. Circumcision never was the shadow, but the body and substance of a Sacrament. It could therefore be no more a type of Baptism, than the broad seal of England three hundred years ago, was a type of that seal, whereby the acts of our present sovereign are authenticated and confirmed. Circumcision was, in its degree, to the full as real and substantial an ordinance, as Baptism at the present hour: and therefore the latter succeeded to the former, not as the antitype to the type, not as the rising sun to the morning star, which foretells its brightness; but as one positive institution succeeds to another, at the will of that authority wherein both originated, and whereby both or either might be continued or withdrawn.

Some Socinians indeed, argued the fitness of abolishing Baptism altogether in Christian nations, where the great body had already received it; alleging, as the Jews had done before them, that the Baptism of the father sufficed for them, and for their posterity. Socinus himself first gave this poor reason, at which so many of his followers have grasped, if thus they might dishonour Jesus and his command.

It matters not, saith he, whether those who are born of Christian parents and profess the Gospel, as did their parents, be baptized or not: equally indifferent is it whether their initiation if it must take place at all, date from infancy, or riper years. And why was this? Is it difficult to discern the enmity of that arch heretic's mind against the great doctrine of the Trinity in Unity,—a doctrine, against which infidelity could hardly hope to succeed (as indeed the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,) so long as persons, whether infant or adult were baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The opponents of infant Baptism[1] have themselves acknowledged that it was practised so early as at the end of the second, or the beginning of the third century: gaining ground, until near the end of the fourth century; when it continued the stated, settled, undeviating practice of the whole Church for eleven hundred years, and more, until the Anabaptists of Munster brought in their opinions; and with them the licence, pollutions, and horrors, that dis-

[1] Rev. C. Jerram on Secession from the Church of England, quoted in the Church of England Magazine, Part X., p. 131.

graced and impeded the Reformation in many parts of Germany. But if it can be shewn that there never were any limitations—that on the other hand, as it was an apostolic practice to baptize infants, so it was continued down from them, even to the day when Luther first hurled the thunders of the Bible against the abominations of Rome; it will equally appear, that they who object to the Church of England Baptism of infants have done so without a cause. Be it then supposed that Christians were now, as it is alleged they were, at the close of the second century, in the uniform habit of admitting only adults to the Sacrament of Baptism. Suppose an individual came forward to assert, that this universal assent of Christians is founded in error, unsupported by apostolical usage, directly in opposition to scriptural precedent; and should immediately and vehemently insist upon the right of infants to the blessings of this sacrament. Would such an extraordinary avowal, and consequent demand, gain immediate credit, and silence all objections? Would it be ushered in to the reception of the universal Church, with loud acclamation of consenting minds, as a Roman General to his triumph in the capitol, followed, welcomed, applauded by every in-

habitant within the city walls? Or would not the announcement rather be treated with contempt, as the dreamings of one beside himself?

If however, contrary to all probability it should gain him proselytes, would not a host of antagonists start up, like the fabled combatants of old from the dragon's teeth, to oppose the strange thing thus brought to men's ears? Would not every advocate for apostolic usage—every zealot for scriptural Church membership, gird on his harness, and go forth to warfare with an enemy so unexpected, and so dangerous? Should it still spread (like the impure and baleful doctrines of Mahomet, over the surface of the Christian world) until amidst all opposition, it was embraced by every denomination of men who owned allegiance to the Gospel, would there be no record of an event so mighty, of a revolution so stupendous? And yet such a change is said to have taken place within the Church of Christ, at the end of the second century. At a period when the practice of the Apostles must have been familiar to the household of God, and their authority unchallenged, it is asserted that every Christian in every Church, in every nation where Christ is named, advocated the exclusive Baptism of

adults, without one solitary instance of exception in favour of infants. All, with one consent, without a murmur of opposition had thrust them from the pale of the covenant. But at this moment the unanimity was disturbed, the universal practice set at nought, and subverted. The new opinion for Infant Baptism made a proselyte of universal Christendom. By what art, by what power could this mighty change be achieved? By what name was the individual who commenced it known; to what nation did he belong? What were his arguments—by what overwhelming force did he silence objection, eradicate prejudice, subdue passion, and lead the whole Christian world bound to the car of this great triumph? We demand the recorded history of this alteration; but we ask in vain. An essential change hath passed upon the Church of the Redeemer. Apostolic usage has been abolished; a practice utterly unscriptural has been introduced; and nobody knows by whom. No record of the controversies wherein the Church was engaged relates that any such change was contemplated, still less that it was effected. To such difficulties are we reduced by the assumption that only adult Baptism was practised until the end of the

second century, and then the Church of God suffered in this respect an entire change of its constitution. We have on the other hand every proof, short of actual demonstration, that infants enjoyed the first blessed Sacrament of the Church in the days of her apostles, and agreeably to the express command of her gracious and glorious Founder.

I pass on to a few of the testimonies left by those fathers of the Church, who were the most competent witnesses of her practice, to whom we can refer, and who, on this ground at least, demand and deserve our reverence, as the best expositors of her practice. Justin Martyr wrote about forty years after the Apostles. He says, "Several persons among us of sixty or seventy years of age, who were made disciples to Christ in their childhood, continue still uncorrupted, or virgins." The term 'made disciples,' is precisely that which has been used by our Lord in connexion with Baptism; and which our translators have rendered 'teaching'—a most forcible proof of infant initiation into the Christian covenant. Again, 'We also, who by Him (the alone Mediator) have had access to God, have not received carnal circumcision, but spiritual, and we have received it by Baptism,

through the mercy of God because we were sinners: and in the same way are all persons enjoined to receive it.'[1] Irenæus was a champion for the faith and truth as it is in Jesus, about sixty-seven years after the Apostolic day. And what is his testimony? 'He (Jesus Christ) came to save all persons by Himself—all, I mean who are by Him regenerated unto God, infants, and little ones, and children, and youths, and elder persons. This regeneration, Justin Martyr most plainly and emphatically refers to Baptism.'[2] Of this regeneration, infants were plainly capable—and if it were indeed only another name for Baptism, as the testimony of the earliest fathers unite to prove, it clearly shews not only that infants were capable of Baptism, but actually and constantly enjoyed it. Tertullian, who taught about one hundred years after the Apostolic era, gives some reasons, into which it is unnecessary to enter, why Baptism may be profitably delayed, especially in the case of little children; an opinion in which he is singular among his brethren—but the very caution most decidedly implies the prevalence of the custom. Origen,

[1] Wall on Infant Baptism, pp. 13—17. Ed. 1705.
[2] Ibid. 15.

who wrote about ten years afterwards, observes, "Infants are baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Of what sins, or when have they sinned: or how can any reason of the laver in their case hold good? except according to that sense which we mentioned even now? None is free from pollution, though his life be but of the length of one day upon the earth; and it is for that reason, because by the Sacrament of Baptism, the pollution of our birth is taken away, that infants are baptized."[1] In this passage we have a plain declaration of Infant Baptism, in the very early Church, and that upon the ground of a pollution coextensive with the whole human race. It is unnecessary to bring forward any more from the great cloud of witnesses adduced by the divines of the Anglican Church, for the Apostolic origin of Infant Baptism; or rather for the Apostolic execution of that large and comprehensive commission of mercy, wherewith the great Head of the Apostles had intrusted them; and which He had ordained as the entrance door into that fold of salvation, where they were to feed his lambs and his sheep with the bread of life.

[1] Wall on Infant Baptism, p. 34. His series of proofs on this subject is complete and irrefragable.

The preceding discourses may be regarded as a foundation whereon the practical character, the spiritual privileges, the momentous duties, the glowing hopes, the sacred claims and obligations arising out of the holy Sacrament, ordained by the Lord of glory for his Church, must rest. It is for you to judge, with the word of the truth of God in your hands, whether that foundation hath been rightfully, lawfully, and sufficiently laid. If really so, then I would affectionately exhort those who may heretofore have indulged the persuasion, groundless in itself, and cruel to the little ones whom Jesus called in the tenderness of mercy to Himself, whether they may guiltlessly hold early Baptism lightly, and defer it from day to day, from month to month, from year to year? I ask, whether they who cannot help themselves, must be abandoned to extraordinary helps for salvation, whereof we have no assurance, and of which we have no scriptural warrant, while we neglect, on their behalf, adopting the way and means which come to us enforced by a precept of Christ,[1] by the obedience of his Apostles, and by the imitation of the Church? I ask, whether, in short, it be not a

[1] Laud's Conference with a Jesuit, Sect. 15, p. 56.

neglect, for which we must be prepared to answer unto God, at the bar of eternal judgment, that we have delayed to make our children, in this holy rite, members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven?

SERMON XXIX.

ISHMAEL'S MOCKERY AND PUNISHMENT.

GENESIS XXI. 8—10.

AND THE CHILD GREW, AND WAS WEANED: AND ABRAHAM MADE A GREAT FEAST THE SAME DAY THAT ISAAC WAS WEANED. AND SARAH SAW THE SON OF HAGAR THE EGYPTIAN, WHICH SHE HAD BORNE UNTO ABRAHAM, MOCKING. WHEREFORE SHE SAID UNTO ABRAHAM, CAST OUT THIS BONDWOMAN, AND HER SON: FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE HEIR WITH MY SON, EVEN WITH ISAAC.

IT is one among those sacred and profitable truths, which the obedience of Christian faith soon learns to lean upon and embrace, that "*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,*"[1] that the surface of a scriptural statement, hastily or slightly examined, may give no indication of the spiritual

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

mine which lies below: and that, in order to open and enjoy its gracious wealth, we must often make entrances into it from other parts of the divine word. An ordinary reader of Scripture, regardless of its references, would see in the text only the record of a petty dispute between two rival children; wherein the mother of one party interfered, and ungenerously took advantage of her power over her husband, to banish the rival of her son from his father's house, and to concentrate the whole of Abraham's heart and possessions upon the object of her own exclusive tenderness. But when the Holy Ghost, by the hand of St. Paul[1] draws aside the veil, behind which little or nothing might be expected, and enables the observer to compare spiritual things with spiritual, a sublime mystery becomes manifested; a picture of amazing grandeur is presented to the mind, dark with the terrors of Sinai, and radiant with the brightness of evangelical light and love. The Law and the Gospel, life and death, blessing and the curse, are there put into a stern and irreconcileable opposition, of which the dispute between Ishmael and Isaac, and the relative

[1] Gal. iv.

position of each in Abraham's house, was but a faint and feeble emblem; and the reader is commanded to choose between them.

The primary and obvious sense, must not however, be passed by and forgotten, in that which is secondary and spiritual; although the weight and value of the latter exceedingly transcends the former. In fact, the history is the key to the allegory: it is the holy place which must be passed, in the way to the most holy, if the wonders there disclosed are to be properly understood. I propose then to examine

I. The Historical Fact.

II. Its Allegorical Character.

A rapid and hurried glance is all that can be taken. I must intreat you to carry the subject into your closets for prayerful diligent examination: as one that will abundantly repay the time spent in holy meditation upon it.

I. The Historical Fact.

Ishmael was thirteen years old, when the long-promised child, the long exercise of Abraham's enduring faith, and of his hope against hope, was given to his prayers, in the birth of Isaac. Of the time when it was customary to wean the child, from the milk of his mother's breast, to stronger food, there is no certainty.

It probably differed, according to constitutional vigour, and consequent fitness for the change. Even so, even with such wisdom, and tenderness of love doth the Holy Ghost provide for the spiritual sustenance of the children of God;—feeding them, like the Saviour his disciples, as they are able to bear it. "*I have fed you,*" said St. Paul, addressing the Corinthians, "*with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it: neither yet now are ye able.*"[1] "*When for the time,*" saith the same condescension of Apostolic love, to the Hebrew converts, "*ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one should teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*"[2] Blessed Lord! how graciously dost Thou carry the Lambs in thy bosom; how gently lead those that are with young! Come, then, and learn of Him; "for He is meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

It would appear however, that the weaning took place when Isaac, although very tender in years, was in some degree able to feel the scorn,

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 2. [2] Heb. v. 12.

contempt, and mockery of Ishmael. Upon this occasion Abraham made a feast; probably a customary matter, as an act of holy acknowledgment and thanksgiving, that the child of promise, the progenitor of the world's Saviour, had escaped the dangers of earliest infancy, and gave promise of increasing health and vigour. On this occasion of solemn and sacred mirth, when the hearts of Abraham and Sarah, not only as natural parents, but as spiritual believers, were filled with joy to overflowing, Ishmael rudely and profanely mocked. There is no reason to imagine this ill-timed opportunity for a wicked deed, to have been its first commission. It probably grew upon him by degrees; until what was first perhaps an act of sudden profaneness, became at length a habit of settled malignity. And surely this is the very mode, in which the unwearied enemy of man, leads the souls, in whom he rules, to their ruin. "*Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed.*" "*Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death.*"[1] "*When I saw*" said Achan, (as the

[1] James i. 14, 15.

hand of God arrested him in his guilt) "*among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, than I coveted them and took them.*"[1] Sinner, be not ignorant of Satan's devices. Flee to the cross for safety; flee to the Spirit of God for strength to resist them. Believer, keep thine heart with all diligence. Give it by faith into the custody of Christ's Almightiness; that so He may keep it and thee, by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

In what especial manner this mockery, (which is now perhaps first mentioned because it now first fell under Sarah's notice, was exhibited,) the Holy Ghost has not seen good to inform us. It appears almost beyond question to have regarded Isaac's distinguished position and privilege, as the child of promise, and the large inheritance of good, both temporal and spiritual, wherewith that promise was connected. So indeed we may infer, from the words in which Sarah's enkindled anger was expressed: "Cast out this bondwoman, and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not

[1] Joshua vii. 21.

be heir with my son, even with Isaac." Ishmael had been partaker of that holy instruction, which Jehovah testified that Abraham would communicate to his household, and to his children after him. He therefore could not be outwardly and literally ignorant of the vast and various blessings which were enwrapped within those promises, to a child of a birth so strange and miraculous as Isaac. With that carnal mind then, which is enmity against God, with that envy towards the distinction of others, which loves to poison their happiness, while it stings and envenoms its own to death, he derided and scoffed at Isaac.

It was no less a mockery of Isaac's God and portion, than of himself. Proud of his greater age, perhaps of his natural gifts; of high and unsubdued frame of heart, Ishmael counted spiritual mercies nothing. He profanely dared to scoff, in the bitterness of an unbelieving spirit, at one who possessed blessings, whereof he knew not the value, and therefore despised the preciousness. Well said the Saviour, foreknowing how fearfully the ever blessed Gospel of his grace and love would arouse the strife and hatred of men's minds against it, and against those who should cling to it, as their soul's

hope and portion, "*Think not, that I am come to send peace upon earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance with his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law, against her mother in law: and a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*"[1] Blessed Jesus! is this possible? May it indeed be, that thy message of mercy from the Father's bosom, and from the cross;—a message, of which every word breathes Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will to men—peace and good will, purchased at no meaner price than the outpouring of thy blood, should cause strife and dissension between hearts which love should bind together in the holiest bonds? Is it possible that the very seed of life eternal, when scattered by the same hand, should spring up, in some to a harvest of malice and bitterness toward their nearest brethren according to the flesh? It is the enmity of the serpent's seed against the seed of the woman. It is the devil in the unbeliever's heart, fighting against Christ Jesus in the believer's heart;—hating the image of the Son of God, even in a brother; and

[1] Matt. x. 34—36.

making all the charities of life, that should utterly quench and overcome such hatred, like a screen of flax before the refiner's fire. "*Cain the first murderer was of that wicked one, and slew his brother: and wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*"[1] Such feuds divide and distress families at this day. A knowledge of salvation, in the all atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, with a resulting desire to serve Him in holiness on the one hand; and a contempt of salvation—a hard, impenitent, unbelieving heart, like the rock in Horeb, as yet untouched by the rod of Moses, on the other hand, break that charity, which is the very bond of peace and of all virtues. They aggravate every difference, embitter every dispute, and shed gall and wormwood into the intercourse of every hour. *It must needs be*—(for so the Great Amen hath said,) *that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.*[2] There is no malice deeper, there is no feud more bitter, than that which the godlessness, unbelief, pride, presumption, and blindness of the human heart, in the things of God and salvation, engender and nur-

[1] 1 John iii. 12. [2] Luke xvii. 1.

ture there against those who love their Heavenly Father in sincerity, and would follow peace with all men. The very tenderness of kindred and connexion, the very narrowness of the battle field, whereon the strife between those who are Satan's, and those who are Christ's—a combat of aggression on the one hand, and of passive resistance, in holy meekness on the other—the very narrowness I say of the battle field—which is just the walls of the same house, the seat around the same table, the outward worship around the same family altar, and it may be, the pillows of the same bed, cause the conflict to be more fiercely waged on the one hand, and the more powerfully sustained on the other:—even as civil broil and war are more sanguinary, fought with friends and fellow countrymen, before their own doors, than those carried on between foes of different countries, on a neutral soil.

Whatever was the spring of Ishmael's mockery, (and that it was a profaneness such as Esau afterwards exhibited, we cannot doubt) the Holy Ghost hath taught us, in St. Paul's application and exposition of the passage, that it was a persecution. "*As then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after*

the Spirit, even so it is now."[1] Mark, then, ye, whom love to your Lord—faith in Him, working by love, constrain to desire his glory, own his name, and delight in his holy Law, even amidst the contentions and opposition of those, to whom that Name, that Law, that Glory are a by-word and a reproach—mark what the faithful and true Witness hath told you by his Spirit—what indeed was substantially told you by the Angel of Jehovah—the Word of the Lord in human flesh, from the first display of the serpent's enmity; "*They that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.*" The serpent's seed shall bruise your heel, in these trials, as the serpent bruised the heel of Him whose you are, and whom you serve, in temptation, persecution, and on the cross. But in your patience possess ye your souls. Hear Him, whose voice of salvation, has heretofore sounded so sweetly in your hearts; and obey his precept, while you rejoice in Him, and glorify Him for his love. "*I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.*"[3]

[1] Gal. iv. 29. [2] 2 Tim. iii. 12. [3] Matt. v. 44.

Beware, however, of affecting heroism in religion. Avoid any resemblance to that spirit of unhallowed eagerness for martyrdom, though in the cause of Jesus, and the truth as it is in Jesus, which marked a decided declension from the pure simplicity of his faith in the earlier ages of the Church. Wait until you fairly meet the cross; then take it up thankfully, and meekly bear it after Christ. Watch well over your own spirits; "*watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*" Let it be seen that nothing can embitter your own love; that it never burns more brightly, never aims to melt and subdue, by its gentle mightiness more strenuously, than when it is most bitterly and determinately opposed. Adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things. Bear witness to the beauty of holiness, the lightness of the burden, and the easiness of the yoke of your Redeemer, by the consistency of a Christian walk. Here will be a testimony for God, more powerful to convince gainsayers, than if you could speak like the sons of thunder in argument and dispute. Your communing with an angry and opposing world, should resemble that of Jehovah, when he came to the prophet, at the entrance of the cave in Horeb; not in the

wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in the still small voice.

The anger of Sarah was enkindled, on beholding the mockery and persecution which Isaac was enduring at the hand of Ishmael; and she immediately addressed Abraham in terms of the utmost urgency, that the youth should be driven forth from the house, and from all participation in the heritage. The Holy Ghost tells us, by St. Peter,[1] that Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, in token of a wife's fealty, duty, and subjection, according to the appointment of God Himself. Yet here we find her using language, rather of the most determined and independent resolve, than of meek and gentle entreaty. How may these things be? The answer is plain; there might be, no doubt there was, much of the partiality of parental love, much of the passion of human anger in this requirement. But as Balaam, in after days, was constrained, (enemy and opposer of God as he was,) to bless when he would have cursed, and only to speak that which the Lord put into his mouth, so here, faithful Sarah, amidst all the risings of natural

[1] 1 Peter iii. 6.

temper, is overruled by the Spirit of God thus to speak, for purposes of immeasurably higher signification than could be comprehended in the mere request for Ishmael's removal. It was a demand for separating the holy seed from the profane, whereof perhaps even the father of the faithful himself did not so immediately perceive the necessity, because affection for Ishmael was a mote in his eye. It was not merely to send away one who derided and persecuted his brother, and mocked at that glorious vision wherein Abraham saw the day of the Son of Man, with all the blessings of salvation that dawned and broke upon the world in its brightness; thus impiously turning God's chiefest mercy into a laughing stock. It was not merely a resolve to have a son removed who thus dishonoured his father's faith and his father's God, disturbing the peace of his household with strife and bitterness of spirit. It was not merely the desire of discarding one, whose conduct thus proved his ungodliness, and whose example, if it failed to excite a salutary dread and horror, might be productive of imitation to Isaac's own sin and misery—a consequence at which parental solicitude, parental love, parental tenderness, in a believing mother,

for a child's soul might well tremble. It was not merely this result, which such a mother's eye might contemplate as a dreary horizon of vast and urgent danger, to her own peace, to her son's hopes, to her husband's honour, to the very glory of God. It was more, much more than this. It is beyond all reasonable question, that Sarah's mind and tongue were governed by a secret instinct and influence of the Holy Spirit of God. Under his supreme direction and agency, not less mighty, because it moved not upon the surface of her consciousness, she was the minister of a great and terrible judgment against profane and wicked Ishmael. By this act of expulsion, (for such it almost was, rather than a request for it at Abraham's hand,) she undoubtedly fulfilled one of the hidden purposes of the divine mind, to be brought to light nearly two thousand years afterwards; and became one of the characters in an allegory, whereby the Church of Christ Jesus was to be instructed through all succeeding time of his Gospel dispensation. She was thus to shew in type and figure, what after ages should see, as a body of divine and gracious truth,—the nature of the law of works; the manner in which legality opposes itself to the

Righteousness of Christ; the enmity of unbelief against the truth of God, and the God of truth; whether that enmity strike with the sword of actual violence, or, being providentially restrained from having such power, darts its envenomed shaft against the Lord, and persecutes Him, by ridiculing his people, his truth, his honour, his holiness, and the blessedness of his faith, in the hearing of those who glory in his cross.

The anger of Sarah was kindled, not only against Ishmael, but against his mother, here distinguished, not more broadly by her name, than her country. "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she bare unto Abraham mocking." And at this time, as some imagine, began that four hundred years affliction of Egypt, spoken of. Gen. xv. 30. The bondwoman had been already driven to flee from Sarah's face when she dealt hardly with her. At the bidding of the angel of the Lord, who met her by the fountain of water in the wilderness, she had returned, and, outwardly at least, had submitted herself under the hand of her mistress. Ishmael was not then born. Sarah's continued barrenness had probably led Hagar to expect the birthright for that son, whom the Lord had

given her. And when at length the stupendous miracle of Isaac's birth effectually dispersed that vision, as an early cloud, or as the morning dew, before the sun rising in heaven, envy at Isaac's superiority of temporal and spiritual privilege, uniting with a sense of injury at Sarah's hand, might perhaps induce her to encourage this temper of unbelief, mockery, and persecution in her son towards the child of Jehovah's power and promise. Alas! we know not what manner of spirit we are of. They were apostles of the Prince of peace,—one of them, that disciple whom Jesus loved, who wished to call down fire from heaven, and consume the Samaritan village, that refused to receive their master. Our unhallowed passions will assume strange forms to gratify themselves, and to do the work of Satan within us, for sin and sorrow, as well as the work of Satan without us, for confusion and mischief: even as when the great enemy took the serpent's form, to gratify his malice against God, and to wound Jehovah, if it were possible, through the happiness and life of his yet unsinning creature. But woe to that house, (for there is guilt, there will be shame, and strife, and division,) in which a parent, whether father

or mother, can be so far led captive by the Devil, can have so much of the spirit of that destroyer of souls, as to take part with an irreligious child, in mockery or persecution of any who love the Saviour within the same family. "*Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were good for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea.*" [1] O beware how, by the feeblest, by the most indirect encouragement, you put a child into the seat of the scorner, and teach him how to join the uncircumcised in heart, against the people and cause of the Redeemer. You know not what you do. You may be laying a match to the train, which shall kindle an explosion, wherein your peace and the peace of others may perish. You may be raising a storm, which one day you would give worlds to hush; but which may howl and rave around you and them, until it make shipwreck of souls for ever. Nor can I discover within the dark and dismal range of those awful judgments, wherewith the Son of Man, when He cometh in the consuming glory of his latter day, shall overtake

[1] Matt. xviii. 6.

and overwhelm them who know not God, nor obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, one sentence of condemnation more terrific, than that which awaits a professing Christian parent, whose evil example, or whose wretched prejudice against the Gospel of salvation, and the children of God, tends to fix the same rebellion and opposition of heart in a son or a daughter. Flee from such a position of guilty peril, and from such a gulph of coming misery. But whither shall ye flee? To Him who will receive you with arms of love, as widely outstretched to embrace you, as when they were extended on the cross, to comprehend a lost world in his salvation. Flee to Him, who, though your sins have been as scarlet, will make them whiter than snow; though they have been red like crimson, will make them as the pure and spotless fleece of wool. Flee to Him who will teach you no longer to make your children pass through the fire unto the Moloch of your unholy and guilty prejudice against his grace. He will give you spiritual love and spiritual power, the rich outpouring of his Holy Spirit, whereby you may bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as members of that family in heaven and earth, which is named by

the name, bought with the blood, sanctified with the Spirit, and adopted into the heritage of Christ Jesus.

Abraham deeply and dearly loved his eldest son. He had already pleaded spiritually for him before God, when his faith hardly dared to lift up its eyes to the fulfilment of the promise in Isaac. And now that Sarah, speaking by the Holy Ghost, (for St. Paul asks, "What saith the Scripture,") demands Ishmael's dismission, "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son." But mark the triumph of faith in this stern exercise of self-denial. He hears and owns Jehovah's voice by Sarah's lips. He hears the command of God, and is prepared for the sacrifice, as afterwards to make a dearer offering upon Mount Moriah. "*Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman: in all that Sarah hath said unto thee hearken unto her voice: for in Isaac shall thy seed be called: and also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.*"[1] And thrice blessed is that man, whose faith places all the objects of

[1] Gen. xxi. 12, 13.

his dearest affections at God's disposal; makes him not only willing to go forth with them, whithersoever God in mysterious providence may call him; but to dismiss them from his wishes, and from an undue place and influence in his heart's affection, as the Saviour dismissed his spirit on the cross, when God saith unto him, "Be it so." The thing will seem grievous indeed, when beheld with the eye of natural love; but when the love of God, realized by faith, and the wisdom of God, seen by faith, are present with God's bereaving call within his heart, he girds up the loins of his mind to endure the trial, to acquiesce in the separation: he lays his hand upon his mouth, and his mouth in the dust, to say, "*It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good*," [1]

In closing the *historic* portion of this subject, I may observe

I. *How differently the same unsearchable riches of divine grace in Christ Jesus, are regarded and dealt with by the believer and the infidel.* Abraham laughs for joy at the birth of Isaac; because he beholds in him a mighty and glorious vindication of the truth of God's

[1] 1 Sam. iii. 18.

word and promise. Sarah laughs with sacred delight, that she shall have pleasure in her son, a pleasure wherein Abraham her Lord shall so largely share.

Jehovah expressly orders that his name shall be called Isaac: that is, *Laughter*. There is great cause of hallowed joy,—more especially, when Abraham, looking from Isaac's birth to the Incarnation of the everlasting Word of God, sees his far distant day, and leaps for gladness. The most substantial part of all these mercies,—a personal interest in the salvation of the Lamb of God is equally put, if he will believe, into Ishmael's power. But Ishmael turns the whole deep mystery of redeeming love, and believing blessedness into scorn, and ridicule, and persecution, in Isaac's person. The term *mocking* means laughing. The believer's laugh of holy joy, the heart's deep thankful merriment of praise and gratitude, and love, and hope, and blessedness, was upon the lips of Abraham and Sarah. Ishmael's laugh, on the contrary, was the infidel's contemptuous sneer, deriding the whole plan of mercy: despising God's chiefest gift; provoking the Most High to exclude him from the privileges of Abraham's house; and (as a typical emblem of the scorner,) from the

house of salvation in the gospel. Beware, then, lest any one of you fall into the same condemnation of unbelief. There is the same cloud to the Israelite and to the Egyptian, and the same Jehovah in it: but it hath a double face; it is light and love to one, threatening and wrath to the other. "*We are a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish; to the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life.*" [1]

II. As this Scripture gives a solemn warning to the scoffer and the infidel, *so it ministers comfort and assurance of hope to the believer, when called to suffer for the truth's sake.* He that now lets may continue to let; but he will be taken out of the way. Yet a little while and the trial shall be passed; yet a little while, and the furnace depths, trodden by the feet of patient faith, shall be trodden no more. The voice of the Great King, in present providence, or in a nearly approaching deliverance by other means, shall cry to his tried and tempted ones, "*Ye servants of the most High God, come forth and come hither.*" [2] Some of the Redeemer's disciples may be exercised with family

[1] 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. [2] Dan. iii. 26.

oppositions, and find hindrance where they might more fitly look for support. Well, fear ye not,—but pray with martyred Stephen, "*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*"[1] "*When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*"[2] "*If ye were of the world, the world would love its own,*" said our Saviour, "*because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*"[3] "*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*"[4] See that your faith be active enough to reconcile the providence with the promise. See that your faith draw sweetness out of this cross. See that your faith bring its bough of marvellous virtue, for these bitter waters; and they will not only be tolerable, but medicinal. All these things, trying as they now are, will be among those appliances of your Father's love, and your Saviour's tenderness, which, rolling on the wheels of unerring providence, (the eye of God being in the wheels,) shall work together for your good. As your afflictions abound for Christ, your con-

[1] Acts vii. 60.
[2] Prov. xvi. 7.
[3] John xv. 19.
[4] John xvii. 35.

solations also shall abound by Christ. The persecution cannot hinder the blessedness. It is God's gift that you are *called* to suffer, and *enabled* to suffer: and "*the light affliction which is but for a moment, shall work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while you look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*" [1]

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

"From Abraham, by his two sons Isaac and Ishmael, went forth a two-fold progeny, and a two-fold promise. In each progeny the promise of Jehovah has, in point of fact, had a double accomplishment,—a temporal and a spiritual. Isaac, the legitimate heir, through Judaism and Christianity, has given laws and religion to a great portion of the inhabited world; Ishmael, the illegitimate seed, through the primitive Arabians, and the variously incorporated Moslems, has given laws and religion to a still larger portion of mankind. Isaac new modelled the faith and morals of men: first, through his lineal descendants the Jews,—and secondly, through his spiritual descendants, the Christians. Ishmael effected a corresponding revolution in the world: first through his literal descendants the Arabs,—and secondly, through his spiritual descendants, the Turks and Tartars. In the case of Isaac, the change was wrought by the advent of Jesus Christ; a person, uniting in Himself, by divine appointment, the offices of Prophet and Apostle, of Priest, Lawgiver, and King. In that of Ishmael, the change was effected by the appearance of Mahomet, a person professing to unite in himself the same offices, as by the divine appointment.

The blessing promised by God to Abraham in behalf of his sons, was necessarily a divided portion, since "the son of the bondwoman

could not be heir with the son of the free woman." The division, it is observable is apportioned with strict regard to this grand distinction, both in the wording of the two promises, and in the matter-of-fact accomplishments. The promise to Isaac is eminently a promise of spiritual blessings: and it issues accordingly, in the establishment upon earth, through his offspring, of a purely spiritual kingdom. The promise to Ishmael is predominantly a promise of a temporal blessing: and it appears to issue accordingly, in the establishment upon earth, through his offspring, of a temporal, as well as a spiritual domination. The birth of Isaac was the subject of promise; and the Messiah, the Heir and dispenser of his blessing, came by promise. The birth of Ishmael was *not* the subject of promise; and Mahomet, the only analogous inheritor and conveyance of his blessing, came without promise. Isaac was the legitimate seed; and conformably with the dignity of his birthright, became the rightful promulgator, through Christ, his Descendant, of the true faith of the gospel. Ishmael was the illegitimate seed; and consonantly with the disadvantage of his birth, became the suitable progenitor, through Mahomet his descendant, of the spurious faith of the Koran.

While therefore, prophecy holds forth Isaac, the child of the Spirit, the son of the free woman, the legitimate seed, as the forefather of the Messiah, and the source of the only true religion; prophecy cannot be supposed to recognize in Ishmael, the child of the flesh, the son of the bond-woman, the illegitimate seed, any thing higher than the forefather of a false prophet, and the source of a spurious faith.

"The apostle Paul, in his scriptural allegory, observes, that, "as then, he that was born after the flesh *persecuted* him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." An allusion, which indicates further, that, while prophecy invariably represents Isaac as the parent of a religion of peace, prophecy could present Ishmael to our view in no more favourable light, than as the father of a religious persecution.' See Foster's Mahometanism Unveiled,' Vol. i. pp. 71, &c. The work presents much ingenious and striking matter upon the subject of Abraham and his sons, in the character and fortunes of their descendants.

SERMON XXX.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE TWO COVENANTS.

GALATIANS IV. 22—26.

IT IS WRITTEN THAT ABRAHAM HAD TWO SONS, THE ONE BY A BONDMAID, THE OTHER BY A FREE WOMAN. BUT HE WHO WAS OF THE BONDWOMAN WAS BORN AFTER THE FLESH; BUT HE OF THE FREE WOMAN WAS BY PROMISE. WHICH THINGS ARE AN ALLEGORY: FOR THESE ARE THE TWO COVENANTS, THE ONE FROM THE MOUNT SINAI WHICH GENDERETH TO BONDAGE, WHICH IS AGAR. FOR THIS AGAR IS MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA, AND ANSWERETH TO JERUSALEM WHICH NOW IS, AND IS IN BONDAGE WITH HER CHILDREN. BUT JERUSALEM WHICH IS ABOVE IS FREE, WHICH IS THE MOTHER OF US ALL.

No prophecy is of private interpretation. It comes not from the prophet's own suggestion or invention. He is only God's organ in what he declares: "*for prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*" [1]

[1] 2 Pet. i. 21.

St. Paul was under the same safe and salutary law, in giving a typical character and reference to any portion of the historical Scriptures in the Old Testament. That reference was suggested to his mind by the unerring Spirit of God, as one of the great items of scriptural truth; as one of the strong and beautiful links of connexion between the instructive shadows of the Old, and the bright realities of the New Testament.

Without such an appropriation of the record concerning Sarah and Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac, contained in Genesis xxi, the great apostle would never have realized it in his own mind; nor if it had been brought home to his apprehension, would he have rashly adventured to lay it before the Church, as part and parcel of the whole counsel of God. And well doth the same caution become every student of the Bible: well were it, if the same reverential awfulness dwelt in every man, while considering and speaking of the mind of God. The Kohathites were not to go in to see when the holy things were covered,[1] lest they should die. The men of Bethshemesh, with all their

[1] Numbers iv. 20.

reverence for the ark, were smitten in great numbers, because they lifted up the mercy-seat to look what lay beneath it.[1] And some things there are in the divine word, "*which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*"[2] A morbid desire to find a type, an allegory, a hidden meaning and an application to some deep mystery of God, in the most plain and ordinary narratives of the Bible hath spread, and doth yet pour forth wild confusion over the Church of Christ; and no testimony against it can be too strenuous or urgent. Our walk of safety and profit, in the paths of typical interpretation, will be to tread where the Holy Ghost hath opened the way, and thus graciously invites us to follow Him in light and truth.

Under this guidance of plenary and absolute inspiration, we connect St. Paul's doctrine in the passage now before us, and its context, with the personal history of Abraham. And I know not how any cautious interpreter could, by possibility, have drawn this contrast between the legal and the Gospel covenant, without the

[1] 1 Sam. vi. 19. [2] 2 Pet. iii. 16.

warrant and teaching of that Eternal Spirit. Thus authorized, thus preceded, thus beckoned forward, thus instructed, it is alike our duty and privilege to bring Moses and Paul together; and endeavour to draw instruction from the union of historical fact with typical signification. The history has been laid before you, with such reflections as it appeared naturally to suggest and enforce.

II. THE SPIRITUAL TRUTH CONNECTED WITH IT, NOW DEMANDS YOUR ATTENTION.

I. St. Paul having referred to the state and circumstances of Abraham's family, his wife, his concubine, and their respective sons, declares that these things are an allegory. What does the apostle mean by this term? An allegory, etymologically and simply considered, signifies, that when one thing is mentioned, another is to be understood. Of this figure of speech there are various examples in Holy Writ: take one from profane history. It was a familiar proverb among the Greeks, to say, "Dionysius is at Corinth:" meaning thereby, that a man was fallen from an exalted to a mean condition. The proverb had reference to this tyrant, who, being expelled for cruelty from his kingdom in Sicily, fled to Corinth, and

there became a schoolmaster. There was no other relation than that of resemblance in reduced circumstances, between the dethroned king, and the person to whom the proverb was applied.[1] Thus too, in the Scriptures, it became a saying in Israel, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" merely to signify any thing strange, sudden, and unexpected.

With these preliminary remarks we are in a position to examine the apostle's statement:

The whole passage, from the 22nd verse to the end of the chapter, is meant to detach every one, into whose hand it comes, whether Jew or Gentile, from a dependence on the law, which is the covenant of works; and to lead him to seek salvation, through the better covenant of grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. The subject embraces the state of the Church at this day, as effectually, and emphatically, as it did eighteen hundred years ago. It is an allegorical representation of the different foundations whereupon men are resting their hopes of eternal life and blessedness: and of their different conditions in the view of a pure and holy God. The whole Christian world may be divided into the

[1] See Quinctilian, quoted by Pierce, on Gal. iv. 22.

two great classes, most widely separated from each other; of those who depend upon their own works, and those who depend upon the all-perfect Righteousness of Christ for salvation.[1] With which of these parties is our place, and our portion?

I. *Abraham then, in this rich vein of the evangelical mine, may be regarded as a typical representative of the visible Church of the living God.* The word of Jehovah had called him from the idolatries of Chaldæa, to dwell alone, and not to be reckoned among the nations. His family was to be solitary and separate, amidst surrounding superstitions and abominations. His own ancestors, in the line of Shem, had not escaped the wide-spread apostacy from God. The recollection of a more pure worship could not indeed have been altogether obliterated. Their unhappy superstition, however, appears to have added a dreadful infusion of that idolatry which was modelled and brought to perfection in the plain of Shinar. With these exceptions the whole earth was sunk beneath a mass of rebellion against the Most High God, as effectually, as deeply, and, (with-

[1] Thistlewaite's Expository Sermons on the Pentateuch, vol. i. p. 11.

out the interference of an Almighty arm,) as hopelessly as were its highest hills, and lowest valleys beneath the waters of the overwhelming flood. Abraham alone knew the character and perfections of Jehovah. He alone truly cast all idolatry behind his back. He alone understood the great secret of salvation by the promised Seed. He alone comprehended the deep blessedness of faith in the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. He alone had that faith imputed to him for righteousness. He alone embraced the exceeding great and precious promises of a divine revelation, whereof the Everlasting Word, in due time to become incarnate, was the substantial glory. With him alone therefore, was true religion to be found, with all its harvest of a full salvation. In his tent and at his altar, the acceptable worship of Jehovah was celebrated, and sinners found approach to a reconciled God, by the new and living way, which had been cast up for them in the God-man, when the bickering flame of the Cherubim turned every way to hinder the lost man from seeking the paradise of life eternal, by the covenant of works.

Behold Abraham then, a type and emblem of the Church of Jesus Christ! It stands, as he

stood, in his tent, alone in the world's wilderness. The gross darkness of paganism, unrelieved by a ray of living light, save when the torch of Christianity, brought by the hand of a faithful missionary, the herald of Christ's salvation, flashes upon it, covers by far the largest portion of the world, as it bows and groans beneath the rule of Satan. The imposture of the false prophet binds millions in its chain. There is indeed among the remnant, a profession of true religion, but mingled, debased, degraded, and dishonouring God, by an infusion of idolatries, which have been poured into it, until its simplicity, beauty, and power, have been mournfully and extensively injured.

"The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered, according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."[1] She is the pillar and ground of the truth: she is the *mother* of saints, when they are born again of water, and of the Holy Ghost in baptism. She is the *nurse* of the saints, by whose hand and ministration the

[1] Article XIX.

bread of life, and the water of life, the wine, and milk, and honey, of evangelical privilege, in the person and office of Christ her glorified Head, are dispensed. She is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. She is the chosen seat of Christ's dominion, governed by the sceptre of his eternal love, enlightened by the manifestations of his presence, upheld by the power of his providence, washed from sin in the precious laver of his blood, sanctified by his grace, taught by his word, restored in wandering by his Spirit, called to witness unto his glory; the habitation of his presence, and the place of his chosen rest. Her privileges are vast, her immunities, such as in their extent and fulness cannot be contemplated by the clearest eye of faith, while yet the believer sees only through a glass darkly. Their grandeur, their length, and breadth, and depth, and height will be measured only by the spirits of just men made perfect, when the glorified soul and the glorified body shall be filled with all the fulness of God.

In Abraham's family however, while he himself was a depository of divine truth, there was a wife and a concubine—a free woman and a bond woman. Each had a son partaking of her

own condition—the one a free man, the other a slave. He who was of the bond woman was born after the flesh, before Abraham's body became dead, and while yet sons and daughters might be given to him, in the course of nature. He who was of the free woman, was by promise —the result of Jehovah's undertaking, and most gracious engagement made with him, when his body and Sarah's womb were both dead, and only quickened by that Spirit who is the power of God, because He is the God of power. That promise he received in the depths of his heart; faith was its echo there, and prolonged God's voice of love and truth, through the expectation of many years, until the appointed season came, and the word of the Most High was fulfilled. "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith giving glory to God." The family therefore of Abraham, although one in name, was composed of members exceedingly different in character and circumstances. Abraham indeed, treated both with exact and impartial tenderness. There was the same circumcision, as a rite of sacred initiation into spiritual relationship with God, and instatement into the fulness of divine promise and privilege. There was the same

nurture, provided from the riches wherewith Jehovah had so amply endowed him. There was the same sacrifice, whereby the regard of all the household was pointed to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, as their only hope, and their only salvation. There was the same instruction, to inform them of Jehovah's will, and fit them for obeying it. But the membership of his family was composed of materials so different and discordant, that the same advantages, the same treatment, the same care, the same tenderness, were followed by the most contrary results.

It is thus in the visible Church of our Redeemer, whereof Abraham and his household were significant emblems, provided for our instruction by the wisdom and goodness of the Holy Ghost. It is made up of two parties, who live under the same law of the same kingdom of gracious love: who are baptised into the same faith; who are fed by the same pure word of Christ, in the preaching of his Gospel; who have participation in the same Sacrament of his death and passion; whose eyes are directed to the same all-prevailing atonement for sin, and the same unchangeable righteousness of God in

Christ, as the believer's portion, to life eternal. There is, I say, the same impartial tenderness of the Church towards every one who hath a name to live in her family, a place in her sanctuary, and to whom is given the opportunity of drawing nourishment unto life eternal from her bosom.

But the parties, as I said, differ entirely with regard to their spiritual position in that Church, and their relation to its glorious Head. The one, albeit by Baptism they who compose it have put on Christ, are still living after the law of the flesh; they are branches in Christ, but bearing no fruit; they are children of the Church, but through neglect of baptismal privileges that filiation is according to the flesh, rather than according to the Spirit:—they have a name that they live, but they are dead to God. They are consecrated to Him by baptismal profession: they have been made partakers of its blessings; they have an outward liberty in the gospel of Jesus; yet all the while they are children of the bondwoman, as to their real, that is, their spiritual state.

The other characters "who compose the elements of the earthly Church," are "*born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the*

will of man, but of God."[1] They are renewed to God by the effectual operation of the Holy Ghost. They have received the Lord Jesus Christ into their hearts by faith: they have communion with Christ by personal and living oneness, maintained through the same faith: and therefore they are the heirs of those exceeding great and precious promises given to the spiritual children of God, in order that they may be partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust. Holiness is their high calling; and it is their heart's desire to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. "*All,*" then, in the highest, dearest, most profitable, and most precious sense, "*are not Israel which are of Israel: neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children: but in Isaac, shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*"[2]

Abraham's family then was a type, nay, more than a type, of the militant Church. It was the very root of that celestial vine, which God,

[1] John i. 13. [2] Rom. ix. 7, 8.

having preserved until this day, still acknowledges as his own, and towards which his husbandry is yet continued. But in the Apostle's allegory, Hagar, whose posterity dwelt in the wilderness, represents Mount Sinai, around which that wilderness was spread. The name is put for the thing signified. She describes

(II.) *The state of those under the Law of ceremonies.* It was promulged amidst the thunders of that mountain, which gendered unto a bondage of ritual observances, utterly without value, or power unto salvation, save as the eye of faith might behold in the blood of bulls and of goats, offered on the altar of the sanctuary, that blood of Jesus Christ who through the eternal Spirit afterwards offered Himself without spot to God, that He might purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God.

The name is put also for those who are seeking justification, glory, honour, and happy immortality, from the moral law. They are unhappily ignorant, that this immitigable Law demands the absolute unsinning, unswerving obedience of the whole man,—body, soul, and spirit; thought, word, and deed—a holiness like that of God, of whose purity and perfec-

tions it is a glorious transcript. But while man is utterly powerless to fulfil the demand, the law gives his miserable impotence, (to say nothing of the absolute and total alienation of his sinful nature) no tittle of spiritual power and sufficiency, wherewith to meet its requirement, and expect recompence on the ground of merit. In this respect Hagar and her offspring answer immediately to Jerusalem, the Jewish Church under the legal covenant, and therefore under a system, not of gracious hope and privilege, save as the law was a schoolmaster to bring her members unto Christ; but under a stern and iron yoke, entering continually into the soul, preventing the access of all liberty and all the priviliges of spiritual freedom, and eventually ministering to expulsion and death.

Hagar is also, by a natural extension of the allegory, a general and enduring representative of the covenant of works, and all her descendants, all the spiritual Ishmaelites of Abraham's professing family, are under the same condemning and enslaving dispensation, however openly they may be enrolled among the members of Christ's holy Catholic Church. Every citizen of this Jerusalem, whether in Paul's day, or in our own, whether within the Jewish

or the Christian fold and family, is under a dispensation of bondage, as enclosed within the prison house of the covenant of works. A heavy yoke is upon his soul. He is a debtor to do the whole law; and he cannot truly discharge one atom of its demand. He is under the bondage of its tremendous denunciation, "*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.*"[1] He is in bondage to the god of this world; whose hopeless slave the legalist must be, until he fly to the liberty of Christ Jesus. He is the bond-slave of his own inward corruptions: for while the law can only give the knowledge of sin, it arms the very pollutions of man's carnal heart against the purity of a holy God, and the exceeding breadth of God's requirement. He is utterly unacquainted with that blessed freedom of access to God, in any and every act of worship, which belongs only to the children of promise. His feet are fettered in the way of holy obedience; and not one step can he tread along the delightful road of filial duty and service. He may look through the bars of his prison, while others walk at large in the light and

[1] Gal. iii. 10.

liberty of the Gospel of peace. But he must remain within its walls, until the Son shall make him free, and then he will be free indeed. He earns the wages, he does the will—and,—as the most dreadful element of all his slavish state, he *loves the service* of Satan. The spirit of Cain is in his heart, the spirit of the murderer; for he loves not the Saviour, nor the Saviour's disciples. Deeply buried there and dreadfully fruitful is the spirit of mocking, persecuting Ishmael. He which is born after the flesh will persecute him that is born after the Spirit. Mount Sinai was not, geographically, more absolutely without the limits of the promised land, than that unhappy soul, a bondman under the covenant of works, is spiritually a stranger to the family of the true Abraham, and to the abounding mercies of that "*kingdom of God, which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*"[1]

(III.) While Hagar however represents the enslaved and unhappy professors of religion, who in the very bosom of Christ's visible Church, have no inheritance in its mercies; *Sarah represents the true, living liberated members of*

[1] Rom. xiv. 17.

Christ's spiritual Church, the children of heavenly and unchangeable promise, the heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, those happy members of his body, who are washed, sanctified, and justified in his name, and by the Spirit of our God.[1] The Saviour hath redeemed them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them. They are delivered from its yoke, that they might receive the adoption of sons. And "*because they are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore they are no more servants, but sons; and if sons, then heirs of God through Christ.*"[2] For them deliverance has been wrought from the unhallowed and hopeless expectation of establishing a legal righteousness before Him who chargeth even his angels with folly, and the heavens are not pure in his sight. "*They are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that they should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead; that they might bring forth fruit unto God.*"[3] "*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death.*"[4] And their feet being shod

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 11. [2] Gal. iv. 6, 7. [3] Rom. vii. 4. [4] Ibid. viii. 2.

with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, in the atonement, they find the way of holiness delightful to their hearts; desiring to perfect it in the fear of God. Their love made perfect, as far as it may be in this state of darkness and sin, casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. Believing in the Saviour, and knowing Him as their portion,—God's covenant of love in Him, with all its full inventory of mercies, to be made sure to them by his death, and sealed upon their hearts by the witness of the Spirit, they rejoice in Him with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. They are members of the Jerusalem which is above; not yet indeed of the Church triumphant, not yet of the Church of Christ in its latter-day glory, when the New Jerusalem shall descend from God out of heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband; but of that liberty, peace, and rest, whereinto they which believe now enter; and which form the elements, as far as they may now be realized, and the earnest pledge and foretaste of the endless and glorious sabbatism that remaineth for the people of God. That Church is said to be above in heaven, because its commencement is from the election and grace of God, dwelling in light, unto which no man can approach; because

it was from Christ the Mediator, when He dwelt in the rest and bliss of his Father's bosom; because its Head of dignity and influence dwells at the Father's right hand, far above all heavens; and because the Church dwells with Him there by faith, until He shall come again, and the tabernacle of God shall be with men. Blessed children, are they of that blessed Church, their mother, and the Redeemer's bride. They shall be fed by the breasts of her abundance, in the word and ordinances of truth. They shall grow up in all things unto Christ their Head. They shall be prepared for their place at the altar, and for their reign on the throne, among those who shall be kings and priests unto God and to the Lamb. "*They are dead, and their life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with Him in glory.*"[1]

This divine allegory hath a resting place in the long lapse of ages between Abraham and Paul. The history was spiritually applied, and proclaimed by the Holy Ghost, in the rapture of Isaiah's prediction. "*Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into sing-*

[1] Coloss. iii. 3, 4.

ing and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife, saith Jehovah." [1] Sarah, whose womb was dead, whose husband Abraham was as good as dead, might well be called desolate: while Hagar, who bore Ishmael when the patriarch was younger, might be called the married wife. Yet Sarah's offspring became like the sand by the sea shore innumerable, and far exceeded the number of Hagar's race the Arabians. The Gentile, as well as the Jewish Church, both here and in the Apostle's argument, are pointed out by the Holy Ghost,—a great multitude, whom no man can number, of all countries, and kindreds, and tongues, and people, "who should wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb," and who should be congregated round the throne of that Lamb for glory everlasting, are here beheld in the prophet's vision, the travail of the Redeemer's soul, the gems and brightness of his mediatorial crown, "*when He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*" [2] The conversion of the Jews,

[1] Isaiah liv. 1. [2] 2 Thess. i. 10.

and the fulness of the Gentiles will complete that family of blessedness, and God shall be all in all. The doors of that house, the joys of that family, are open and offered to all: for if ye be Christs', then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

(I.) *Tell me then, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?*

Hath not this allegory testified, as with the clearness of a trumpet-call, to which family you belong, what are the present circumstances, what will be the future destiny of that household of bondage, unbelief, and the spirit of persecution? You are born of the flesh. Your relation to God, under the law and covenant of works, is not that of promise. Your obedience is not that of grace, but of nature; and therefore it is only outward in the flesh and walk of a visible conversation and profession; instead of being inward, from the true circumcision of the heart. God's visible Church hath received you into her bosom, numbered you among her children. In that house of the living God, in its appointments and ordinances of life and salvation there is bread enough and to spare. There is instruction, discipline, encouragement, and every means for growth in grace. And con-

cerning that visible Church, with all its appointments of love, with all the tenderness of care bestowed upon it; and with all the vast and varied train of its spiritual privileges, the great Husbandman may well ask, "*And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge I pray you between me and my vineyard: what could have been done more for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?*" [1]

But what is your position in the visible Church? You are the bad fish in the net. You are the guests without the wedding garment, at the marriage feast. You are the tares among the wheat. You are bondslaves, among the members of a family of freedmen, made so in Christ Jesus. Your portion is with Ishmael, and not with Isaac. And if you thus remain, what saith the scripture, "Cast out the son of the bondwoman; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." The tares may abide with the wheat; and will so abide, until the harvest. But then the winnowing fan will be spread out; the breath of God in judgment will give it effectual motion; and the separation between that which is to be laid

[1] Isa. v. 4.

up in bliss, and that which is to be burned with fire unquenchable, will be entire, final, eternal. Your lot will be in the desert, far from God, and from all that God in Christ is, and ever shall be to the believer. The covenant of works cannot save you; it can only condemn you.

Ishmael's expulsion was grievous in Abraham's sight, because he was his son. The Church of the living God mourns over every member of its pale, that is dead and enslaved, amidst the rich means of life and liberty. But when the sentence which Jehovah pronounced by Sarah against Ishmael shall be in spirit pronounced against the legalist and self-justiciary, the son of the bondwoman of the covenant of works, then the Church shall acquiesce in that awful decision, which casts from her bosom every unbelieving member, and shall justify the most High God in his judgment and doom of everlasting excision. Turn then to the strong hold. Plead with God against your state of bondage and your inheritance of wrath: and to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts. May the Holy Spirit soften them to faith and love, that you may be no longer children of the flesh, but heirs of the promise!

(II.) "*Now, we brethren,*" *saith the apostle, addressing his children in Christ Jesus,*[1] "*as Isaac was, are the children of promise;*" and as the crowning conclusion of the whole statement, with the momentous truth which it involves, he adds, "*So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.*"[2] To whom is this cheering and happy testimony applicable? To whom can we say, as partners in Paul's ministerial responsibility, and, as earnestly desiring to have fellowship with him in the yearnings of ministerial love,—to whom may we appeal, as to Isaac's spiritual brethren, children of those vast, and sure, and heart-gladdening promises, which, unto Sarah's seed, to the true and living members of Christ's holy Catholic Church, are all yea and amen to the glory and praise of God? We trust that the Spirit may bear witness that ye are the children of God. If so, ye are made partakers of the Holy Ghost, not only in the ministry of the word, and in his outward helps, but in his inward work upon your hearts. Rejoice and be exceeding glad. Your privileges and possessions, in this gracious membership with the

[1] Gal. iv. 28. [2] Gal. iv. 31.

living Church of the living God, no eye can see, no hand measure, no imagination conceive, in their extent of grace, mercy, peace, hope, and joy. Walk then consistently with the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made you free. You are no more servants; but sons. Regulate your conversation accordingly. Your blessings are all *in* Christ, all *from* Christ, all *by* Christ. Give God in Christ then all the glory. The bondservants abide not in the house; they must be cast forth; but the son abideth for ever. Do the great master of that house such service, as becomes his children. Bear testimony to the greatness of his love, and to the happiness of his family. Bear testimony to the holiness which becometh his house. "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" [1]

[1] Matt. v. 16.

SERMON XXXI.

HAGAR'S FINAL EXPULSION.

GENESIS XXI. 14.

AND ABRAHAM ROSE UP EARLY IN THE MORNING, AND TOOK BREAD, AND A BOTTLE OF WATER, AND GAVE IT UNTO HAGAR, PUTTING IT ON HER SHOULDER, AND THE CHILD, AND SENT HER AWAY: AND SHE DEPARTED, AND WANDERED IN THE WILDERNESS OF BEERSHEBA.

THE path of human life is traced through an intricate and tangled labyrinth, wherein men wander up and down, walking in a vain shadow and disquieting themselves in vain, unless faith in the word and truth of Jehovah be the golden thread to guide their footsteps along the proper paths, and to lead them safely, though often mysteriously, towards the rest that remaineth for the people of God. The way will frequently appear to run in directions entirely contradicting the dim sight and unbelieving suggestions of sense: but He who is light, and in whom

dwelleth no darkness at all, leads his confiding people "*by the right way, that He may bring them to a city of habitation.*[1] And when the faith, whereby their varied pilgrimage is trodden, shall be swallowed up in vision, they shall look back upon its darkest and most painful portions, with adoring gratitude to Him, whose wisdom appointed them, whose love illumined them, and whose sovereignty overruled them for good.

By this safe directory of faith was Abraham conducted, through the long and eventful pilgrimage, between the time when he went forth, at God's bidding, from Ur of the Chaldees, to that in which he slept the sleep of the blessed, a hundred years afterwards. It overruled his affections supremely; it guided him securely; it upheld him mightily, throughout the painful transaction, whereof the text forms a part. The whole history has a strong claim upon our regard and prayerful contemplation, as one of those instructive instances, which exhibit the sovereignty of the Most High overruling the ordinary transactions of family life, by mysterious influences. It is written for our instruc-

[1] Psalm cvii. 7.

tion, that we also may look, and learn how absolutely, although not so visibly, He who ordereth all things, both in heaven and earth, dispenses our common and every day concerns with a wisdom that cannot err, and a love that never fails those children of his grace who desire to be directed by the one, and supplied by the other. The fountains of both are opened, and their streams are poured forth from the exhaustless fulness that dwells in Jesus Christ.

We have before us a threefold subject of consideration.

I. The Conduct of Abraham.

There is a simplicity of touch, combined with a breadth of effect in the slightest sketches of the Bible, whereby the pictures which it sets before us, are stamped with the incontestible proofs of his divine hand, who gave them to the Church, for its edification, its furtherance, and joy of faith. Such is eminently the case in the representation before us. It is an exhibition of the most yearning natural tenderness, breaking forth into most affecting sorrow, when it was so severely wounded, by Sarah's demand for the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael. And yet, that tenderness is restrained; it is not permitted for one moment to lift up a voice of

complaint against the dealing, or of opposition to the will of God.

"*The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son.*"[1] Abraham had long clung with fondness to his first born; and seems almost to have in this instance also hoped against hope, that the God of his mercies, the God of truth, would alter the thing that had gone out of his lips, by transferring the promised spiritual blessings, from a son yet unborn, (and whose birth, except by the interposition of some stupendous miracle was impossible,) to the child whom God had already bestowed upon him. "*O that Ishmael might live before thee.*"[2] This natural and becoming sorrow fills the heart of Abraham, and bows it to the dust in heaviness. Is it not then wonderful, that there should be no utterance of a similar but far mightier feeling,—no record that any such emotion existed towards that awful command of God, which afterwards laid upon him the burden of sacrificing his son Isaac, whom he loved, and in whom he looked for the coming of the Son of man, on the errand of a world's salvation? How shall we explain this paradox? How are

[1] Gen. xxi. 11. [2] Gen. xvii. 18.

these seeming contrarieties to be reconciled? How is the tenderness of the father, and the assaulted faith of the believer to be vindicated? Abraham feels grievously his wife's requirement, to cast out the bondwoman and her son; but there is no record of any inward struggle, when afterwards bidden of God to offer the child of many promises given to him with signs and wonders, upon Mount Moriah, for a burnt offering unto Jehovah? The difficulty, if such there be upon our minds, may be solved, by simply considering the manner in which Abraham at first apprehended the call. It seemed to come from Sarah's jealousy,—from the unrestrained passion of a fond and doting mother, inconsiderately, extremely, and uncharitably resolved to punish an offence against her own child. It seems as though, in that blindness of overweening and misguided affection, she forgat the claims of Hagar and Ishmael upon her husband's protecting love; overlooked the misery they might endure, if her harsh request were granted, and the sad privation which they must certainly undergo, by being thrust forth into the wilderness. It was therefore not merely in accordance with the dictates of Abraham's parental love, to mourn over such a

demand: but, under the obligations of parental duty, to resist it, by endeavouring to convince Sarah of her improper wrath; or, failing of producing such conviction, to interpose his authority, and exact the submission of his wife.

But when that voice which seemed to be the utterance of Sarah's prejudice and resentment, is testified to be suggested by the Holy Spirit,—when God saith, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight, because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all things that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken to her voice,"—then the sorrow of Abraham's heart is hushed. He becomes still and submissive. He is prepared to make the sacrifice of his own will, and to offer up his most cherished affections, according to the bidding of his Almighty Friend: and no murmur of discontent is heard from his lips. Like Aaron, he holds his peace: like Eli, he cries, "*It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good.*"[1] His soul's conflict ceases; faith obtains the victory; and the father of the faithful finds peace in believing. Blessed are they who walk even as he walked, trust as he trusted, yield as he yielded, and overcome as he overcame.

[1] 1 Sam. iii. 18.

It is the sacred duty of every one, upon whom the providence of Almighty God has laid the solemn responsibility of parental relationship, to guard his own heart well, and prayerfully, and watchfully, against parental partialities or distinctions between one and another of the children whom God hath given to his prayers. He must resolve with unswerving steadfastness against exhibiting or permitting any preference beyond the approbation of virtue, and the discouragement of sin, among the members of his family. Like God he is to be no respecter of persons: but to deal out tenderness and love, rebuke and chastening, with no other rule than the law of God, and no other desire than to please Him. But when God's pleasure is made known, through the truth of the divine word, concerning the duty towards any child, or when in the manifestations of providence the finger of God seems to demand a sacrifice and a separation, however it may wring his heart with sorrow, and fill his eyes with tears, it becomes him to ask a spirit of holy submission from God, who never gives a stone when his children require bread. In that spirit, so sought and so obtained, he must follow God in the way of appointed trial; girding up the loins of his mind,

and looking for the fulfilment of that wise and gracious saying, "*What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.*" [1]

No duty was ever bound upon the child of God, without being inseparably connected with the promise of God, for mercies either providential or gracious, or for both. The remark is realized in Abraham's experience. "Of the son of the bondwoman will I make a great nation, because he is thy seed." Ishmael shall not inherit the spiritual promise, which Jehovah's eternal purpose and counsel hath vested in Isaac: but the child shall still be beloved for the father's sake. A promise is reiterated, as a strong confirmation of Abraham's faith and hope. It was given to Hagar, when she fled from Sarah's face, before Ishmael was born. It was repeated for the patriarch's consolation, when his laughter at the assurance of Isaac's birth had in it almost as much of unbelief as faith. "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly: twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." And now a blessing shall rest upon him, because he is Abraham's child.

[1] John xiii. 7.

Here then is a general truth, which believing parents may hold firmly to their hearts, when obliged by the apparent direction of God, to send forth their children into a world of trial, slenderly provided. They may plead with the full expectation and assurance of faith, that the seed of the righteous shall not be forsaken; and that the same God, who has supplied all their need "according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," will remember his covenant with the father and mother, in his dealings with their children. Have ye one pleading of supreme desire; O that Ishmael may live before thee? Then assure yourselves of providential, and (though you may not live to discern them,) of spiritual and gracious bestowments, suited to the wants of the body, and the infinitely more pressing and momentous necessities of the soul, vouchsafed to your children.

The nature of the authority whereby Sarah spoke, once admitted,—her voice being felt as the voice of God within his heart, Abraham makes no delay. Whatever might be his tossings to and fro, through a night, in whose dark and silent watches duty and tenderness were at strife within him, the victory is never doubtful, because the faith of God, and the God of faith

are with him. He makes haste and delays not to keep the commandments of his great and gracious Lawgiver. "Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away." O the blessedness of holy decision in the pathway of God! It does Him honour by the readiness of obedience; and it plucks up those roots of bitterness which too frequently and firmly take hold of the heart, when it listens to flesh and blood instead of instantly hearing and obeying God. Abraham in the Old, and Paul in the New Testament, are distinguished examples of this swift and ready obedience. "*When it pleased God to call me by his grace, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.*"[1] But that mind alone can feel this holy readiness, wherein the love of a reconciled God dwells; wherein his will is hidden, as the tables of the law, beneath the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat of the ark of the covenant. Those feet only will be swift to run the way of God's commandments, which are shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. That soul

[1] Luke xv. 21.

only will spring forth to follow God, in paths of sacrifice and self-denial, which feels the constraining influence of the love of Christ.

But why are Hagar and Ishmael dismissed from Abraham's house thus scantily provided? The banishment itself was surely an affliction deep and bitter enough, with every alleviation that gifts and plenty could provide. Is it not therefore to heap one cruelty upon another, that these rejected ones should be sent forth with a loaf of bread and a bottle of water: for I know not that we have reason to imagine these things to be representatives of better and more plentiful food? Was there not a servant that could be spared to attend them? Was there not an ass out of Abraham's field, nor a camel from behind his tent, that could have been laden with some good things by the way? No doubt there were enough of both. Is not Abraham then hard of heart, in denying them such help and support? There is no evidence, no presumptive proof, thus to convict him of unnatural indifference, whether those lately so dear to him, lived or perished in the wilderness. The strong probability is wholly in his favour, that he acted in this matter, as might be expected from a tender parent, an affectionate

master, a true believer, and a friend of God. There was bread to sustain them, until they should come to the place whither Abraham's foresight had no doubt directed them. The water skin contained enough to refresh them, until they reached the appointed well, which he no doubt had fully described. Ishmael was at least seventeen years old, and therefore far beyond the age of helplessness; and there is much reason to suppose that the man of God never intended that he should journey into some far distant country, whither the solicitudes of a father's tenderness could not follow, to assist and bless him, as need should be. Hagar's grief seems to have made her miss the way and the well, and wander entirely contrary to Abraham's purpose, in the wilderness. The separation was absolutely necessary, as a consequence of the divine declaration, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called:" lest in any future time, Ishmael should be reckoned, equally with his younger brother, as of Abraham's privileged family; lest in short, he that was born after the flesh should be confounded with him who was born after the promise. But this decree of God being regarded, every other arrangement of Abraham seems to imply his strong desire that

his first-born should dwell near him, to share his tenderness and power. Behold the path of duty for every relation of life, traced out by the finger of the Holy Ghost! Obedience, the fruit of holy love to God, is the first and great commandment, at whatever sacrifice it may be performed: and the second is like unto it,—the exhibition of all possible kindness, affection, and consolation, towards those whom that unshrinking discharge of sacred obligation may involve in inconvenience, privation, or sorrow.

This remark may fitly introduce the second subject of meditation.

II. The great distress of Hagar and Ishmael.

It seems to have been the determination of that wise and holy God, who will certainly make the sins of men to find them out, although if they close with the means of life, and look in faith to the cross, He will blot out the eternal condemnation pronounced against impenitent unbelievers, that Ishmael should be taught by this painful and humiliating dispensation, how dangerous and destructive it is to abuse gracious privileges, and thus receive the goodness of God in vain. Once put forth as a severe chastening from the fold and pasture of Abra-

ham's family, the two mistake their way. Instead of abiding near the footsteps of that flock, which God had marked for his own,—their course, like that of the prodigal son, is towards a far country. Their means of life are expended; they begin to be in want; and while there is bread enough and to spare,—while there are wells and watersprings by Abraham's tent, they perish with hunger and thirst. How surely must they who sow to the wind, reap the whirlwind! How surely must a process of humiliation and trial await the proud, and those who mock and persecute the faith of God, if indeed, in the freeness of his sovereign mercy, they are restored and pardoned at all! They must expect the well-spring of some earthly comfort to be dried up, and themselves led to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, by paths of shame and suffering. Their contempt of spiritual privileges is visited upon them, and they must know, that it is an evil and a bitter thing to depart from the Lord their God. And it is a dealing of especial love, however painful in its manifestation, when the God of all grace thus hedges up the wilful transgressor's way with thorns; brings him, by the Holy Spirit's sanctification of outward trial to

himself; hastens him to his offended Father's feet, at the throne of grace, there to cry, "*I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*"[1]

The wilderness through which they wandered, had no path, no food, no water, no friendly inhabitants to help and guide them. It was a waste and howling desert, and, the water once spent, they were hopeless of more. How great the difference between their case, and that of Isaac's children, when they wandered over the same parched and fiery wilderness, as the angel of Jehovah led them through it, from the bondage of Egypt, to the rest and plenty of the promised land! They had bread from heaven, the sacramental food of God's provision. They had water from the rock, to follow their footsteps, and refresh them. They had the pillar of fire and of cloud, to guide them with infallible certainty through the trackless waste. Their clothes were not worn, neither did their foot swell during forty years: and the good will of Him who dwelt in the bush, never left them for a moment. Even so vast is the difference between those who endure

[1] 2 Cor. i. 5.

trials, according to the mind of God, and those whom affliction overtakes in the way of sin; or whose transgressions have led them into paths of bereavement and affliction. The one party is privileged to say, "*If our afflictions abound for Christ, our consolations also abound through Christ:*"[1] the other wander and are weary, like Noah's dove over the waters, until the hand of mercy brings them into the ark. Jehovah in Christ is the hiding-place of the one: He shall preserve them from trouble; He shall compass them about with songs of deliverance. The other have no repose, unless the Spirit of God bring them to the ever-ready grace of salvation, that in its most merciful Author, they may find rest unto their souls. "*The man who wandereth out of the way of understanding, shall remain in the congregation of the dead:*"[2] but if from thence he shall seek the Lord his God, he shall find Him, if he seek Him with all his heart, and with all his soul.

It is easy to account for the comparative helplessness of Ishmael. Young persons are more speedily fatigued, than those of maturer years; the fluids of the body are thrown off in

[1] 1 Cor. i. 5. [2] Prov. xxi. 16.

larger quantity, by the more impetuous current of the blood; and the greater rapidity of digestion demands a more rapid supply of provision; so that hunger and thirst soon become more craving and intolerable in them, than in others. Hagar, therefore, might have held on her way a little longer, had not Ishmael failed and fainted. Her deep affection led her to place him under the shadow of the shrubs around, that he might at least die in some little shelter from the fierceness of the sun. She went to a little distance, that her heart's wretchedness might not swell into a still more utter and intolerable woe, by witnessing the death-agony, which she could neither avert nor assuage. She said, "*Let me not see the child die.*" "*And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice and wept.*"[1] Was her cry addressed to God, in the fervent language of wrestling prayer? Did she remember the mighty hand, that had once already delivered her from similar misery and similar death? Did she call to mind the sure promise of God, that her son, then unborn, should become a great nation? The Holy Spirit is silent here; and we can only hope and judge with charity upon her case.

[1] Gen. xxi. 16.

Whither shall a parent flee,—towards what point shall a parent's voice of earnest, fervent, agonizing prayer be directed, except to the city of refuge, the Lamb in the midst of the throne, accessible from every quarter, and with opened ear, with infinite tenderness of love, more ready to hear, than his most afflicted, most destitute supplicants are eager to prove his grace? So the Shunamite pleaded with God's prophet for her son; and he was awakened from the slumber of the dead. So the Syrophœnician clung to Christ for her child, and she was healed. So Jairus besought the Saviour for his daughter, and she lived. So Mary and Martha clung to Christ, as the Resurrection and the Life; and their brother Lazarus came forth from his four days' sojourn in the prison-house of the grave. It is God's own invitation, "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble*"—it is the promise of God's own unchangeable truth, "*So will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise Me.*"[1] If the invitation be obeyed, the truth of the assurance shall be amply vindicated; whether the solicitude be personal or parental. Alas, how fearfully does

[1] Psalm l. 15.

unbelief put back the hand, and distrust the engagements of the Most High! We give Him credit for past mercies; we acknowledge past deliverance; but we cannot or will not be persuaded, that He is equal to any, and every emergency, wherein his providence, whether directive or permissive, hath placed us. "*He smote the stony rock indeed, that the waters gushed forth, and the streams flowed withal; but can He give bread also, or provide flesh for this people?*"[1] He can do all this, and infinitely beyond it. He is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we can ask or think: and it is our chief misery, that in all our other miseries, we do not remember his faithful love, and take refuge by prayer in the sanctuary of his power, through the undrawn veil Jesus Christ.

Turn we then to notice

III. God's dealing with Hagar and Ishmael.

He heard the voice of the lad; whether merely the expression of bodily suffering, the outbreaking of a fear to die, or a gracious and far higher impulse, in the cry for mercy to God,

[1] Psalm lxxviii. 20.

whose worship had been dishonoured, whose covenant had been despised, and whose promises had been mocked by him, in the day of worldly ease and prosperity; but whom he now remembered in the bitterness and anguish of his soul. We will hope the last. God heard him, as the father ran to his prodigal son, relieved his want, snatched him from death; and gave him an undeniable pledge of that good will, and those promises, which were yet laid up in store for him. "*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget, yet will not I forget thee?* saith the Lord of Hosts."[1] Christian wanderer in the wilderness, "*there hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear; but will, with the temptation also make a way for you to escape, that you may be able to bear it.*"[2]

Our very sorrows often blind us to the remedy which lies at the door, awaiting only the eye of faith to see it, and the hand of faith to possess it. "Behold," saith mourning Job,

[1] Isaiah xlix. 15. [2] 1 Cor. x. 13.

"*I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him:*" But then the holy faith of Job adds, "*He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*"[1] In this sadness of spirit the disciples contemplated the approaching departure of their Lord: and sorrow so filled their hearts, that they could not embrace the promised joys of the Comforter, whom He had engaged to send unto them. In this blindness of calamity, when Moses spake of deliverance to the children of Israel, "they hearkened not unto him, for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage."

In this dimness of wretchedness, Hagar saw not the well, which held its life-giving water, although it lay very near, soliciting, as it were, her regard and approach. It might indeed be, that God had withheld her from beholding it; as the Saviour held the eyes of his two disciples; in order that they should not recognise Him, until, in sovereign pity and love, He

[1] Job xxiii. 8—10.

chose to make Himself known in the breaking of bread. And thus the worst extremities of his servants become to Him revenues of glory, by his unexpected and unhoped for interferences to deliver them. His word was pledged, his promise given: heaven and earth might pass away, but that word could not pass away, that promise could not be repealed nor withdrawn. "*Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord,*" said David, "*Lord, hear my voice:*"[1] and it did enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Jonah cried unto him out of the belly of hell; and came again into the land of the living, though the earth with her bars was about him. His soul fainted within him, yet he remembered the Lord; his prayer came in unto Jehovah, even into his holy temple: and then a blessed experience of ready love was compelled to confess, "*Thou hast brought up my life from corruption, O Lord, my God.*"[2] Ishmael is no longer in Abraham's house; but not beyond the reach of Abraham's Almighty Helper. He is saved because of Abraham, and the promise made to Abraham's faith.

And how was the deliverance effected? The

[1] Psalm cxxx. 1. [2] Jonah ii. 6.

Angel of the Lord, the Angel Jehovah,—no created messenger, but the Almighty Messenger of the everlasting covenant, interfered to save Abraham's son. He unto whom, even then, in the counsels of eternal love and wisdom, all power, both in heaven and earth, both in providence and grace was given, undertook and accomplished this rescue from death: a gracious emblem of that almighty rescue, which his cross and righteousness effect from the terrors of the second and eternal death, in those who seek his mercy. The language of Scripture appears plain and positive, in testimony of the divine character of this Messenger. The promise of Jehovah is renewed, "Arise, lift up the lad and hold him in thine hand, for I, (I myself, and not another,) will make him a great nation." What aileth thee then, sinful and mourning spirit, who art lost, wandering, exhausted, drooping, dying in the wilderness? What aileth thee? Fear not. Hast thou prayed, has thy heart sought the God of mercy, as He is ever present in his Son? Listen; for God's own Angel—the Angel of his presence, his might, his love, the Messenger of the covenant whom He delights in, addresses thee. Look unto Him, and be saved. "*If*

thou wilt believe, all things are possible unto him that believeth."

But as Hagar saw not the well, until God opened her eyes, and as then, and not till then, "she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink," so must the power of God in Christ Jesus, attend his promise and his call. The command is given, "Stretch forth the withered hand:" but Almightiness must give the ability, before the sufferer can stretch it forth, and have it restored whole as the other. But where the promise is received in faith, which still God gives, there the power is never absent. "*Said I not unto thee, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*"[2] O fainting spirits! there is a fountain opened in Christ Jesus, for sin and for uncleanness. There is a voice of love from the Word and the Holy Ghost to cry, "*Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*"[3] Beg of God to open your eyes that ye may see it. Beseech Him to bring it to you by the hands of his ministers—of your mother the Church; and drink, and live for ever. "God was with the lad; and he grew, and

[1] Mark ix. 23. [2] John xi. 40. [3] Rev. xxii. 17.

dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer." His mother seems henceforth to have laid hold of the promise made in her son's favour, and to have watched over him accordingly.

Were it thus in the experience of parental faith,—did parental love rest on the promises made to parental trust, and that trust in lively exercise,—were God's exceeding great and precious undertakings on behalf of parents more closely regarded, what blessed effects would follow such simplicity of hold on God as a ground and motive for diligent, prayerful, instruction and example! Many would be the children, now perishing in a spiritual wilderness, for lack of the wells of salvation, restored to life and blessedness: and many would be the outpourings of parental joy, "*This my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost, and is found.*" [1]

[1] Luke xv. 32.

SERMON XXXII.

THE BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE OF CONSISTENT RELIGION.

GENESIS XXI. 22—25.

And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phicol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest. Now therefore swear unto me here by God, that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear. And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away.

A great man has been described as one who can embrace the highest, or condescend to the least important matters, with equal competence and grace. The definition will apply exactly to a man of true religion. As that Almighty Father, whose he is and whom he serves in the Gospel of his Son, not only directs

the harmonies of the mightiest worlds, but arranges the meanest atoms in his creation, with the same ease,—so his renewed children, animated by his Spirit, and governed by his mind, remembering that they serve the Lord Christ, endeavour with equal readiness to adorn the doctrine of their Saviour in all things. With them religion is not a matter to be brought out only on high and momentous emergencies; while the general current of life is regulated merely by ordinary and earthly motives; but whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, they do all to the glory of God. The love of Christ constraineth them; they discern Him, and their relation to Him, in every imaginable circumstance of life: and therefore they have one elastic impulse, capable of reaching the greatest obligations, or contracting itself to enfold and beautify the meanest station, or the most common duties of life. They can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth them.

In this spirit, we have lately seen Abraham acting in the private concerns of family duty and trial. In the history now before us, commencing with the text and ending with the chapter, the divine record brings him under

our notice, exhibiting the same simplicity and godly sincerity in his transactions with a king who sought his friendship, and it might almost be added, his protection. There is equal consistency, the consistency of holy faith, that best and most blessed safeguard of the soul, in both situations. We may therefore hope, in prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit, to draw some profitable lessons for our instruction, by considering

I. THE TENDENCY OF HOLY CONSISTENCY IN A BELIEVER'S CONVERSATION TO HONOUR GOD, BY ITS BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE UPON OTHERS.

That great Apostle who hath left to the Church a summary of the everlasting Gospel, in the emphatic words, "*Ye are not your own, but bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's,*"[1] hath enjoined the disciples of his Lord, as one mean of advancing this high end and aim, "*to walk in wisdom towards those who are without.*"[2] But this is a portion of God's requirements at his children's hand, often ill understood, and consequently very imperfectly

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. [2] Col. iv. 5.

practised. We are too negligent of the duty imposed upon us,—that of making the truth of salvation, and the service of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as attractive and beautiful as possible in the eyes of those who have not yet tasted that the Lord is gracious, or who are only feebly disposed to follow Him, uncertain whether to go with Him steadfastly, like Ruth, or to kiss Him with outward reverence, and draw back again, like Orpah. We lack that glowing zeal for his honour, that one overmastering affection of love and gratitude towards his Person, that all-presiding sense of everlasting obligation to his cross and passion, that transcendant esteem for the excellences of his character, that ever present sense of the felicities of his service, and that deep abiding tenderness for the souls of men, which, regard Him as the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, and as the only hope of life and mercy to endangered souls. We hold Him forth rather with lip confession than with that godly consistency of deed and conversation, that exhibition of Christian graces, that adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, which is often the most eloquent and effectual appeal, that the

living saint can make, to the heart of him who is yet dead in trespasses and sins, or of him, whose eyes are hardly opened by the Saviour's touch, and who yet sees men as trees walking. We too little regard, even though Christ be precious to us as believers, that the candle of God's life in the soul has not been lighted to be covered with a bushel, or set under a bed; but that it may not only be seen by our Lord's household the true and spiritual Church, but may pour some radiance through the windows into the outer darkness, where are so many wanderers; some of whom, attracted thither by its beauty and brightness, may knock at the door, have entrance administered unto them abundantly, and sit down in blessedness, at the marriage supper of the Lamb. We lack life, we lack desire, we lack vigilance, we lack prayer to fulfil the Saviour's command, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"[1] The influence of such a temper, wherein, I repeat, the professed followers of the Redeemer, are so mournfully deficient, is exhibited in the history under consideration,—

[1] Matt. v. 16.

By Abimelech's opinion of Abraham, and conduct grounded on it. He came from Gerar of the Philistines to Beersheba, attended by Phicol the chief captain of his host, to make a solemn treaty with Abraham; not ignorant of Abraham's Almighty Friend and Portion. And upon what principle, by what inducement, under what strong impulse, that such an errand and such an object was his especial interest, his best advantage? Simply this—"God is with thee in all that thou doest." As though he had reasoned thus. I am aware of the promise made to Abraham of a son. I am aware that the son so promised, is the child of an amazing miracle. I am acquainted with his victory over the kings; with the prosperity wherein he abounds; with the steadfastness of his holy adherence to the worship of Jehovah. I see him protected, supplied, increased, blessed of that God whom he serves, and who is thus obviously his all-sufficient Portion. He then shall be *my* friend, who hath thus obviously God for *his* friend. In the same deep, abiding, influential persuasion, that the Most High had blessed David, did Jonathan adjure him, while yet Saul hunted him like a partridge on the mountains, saying, "*Thou shalt not only while*

I live, shew me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not: but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever. And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him as his own soul."[1] Even Saul himself, long after the evil spirit held stern dominion over him, was so fully persuaded of David's happiness and future power as the favourite of heaven, that he asked and received a similar oath at his hand.[2] Ninety years afterwards, another Abimelech, and another Phicol, besought a like covenant from Isaac, the son of the promise: and obtained it from that holy love which overlooked the transgression against him.

It might have been, that Abimelech did not especially love Abraham, but had heard that Canaan was allotted to him in virtue of a divine covenant. Some fear therefore might have haunted him, lest, when Abraham should be put into possession, whether immediately or more remotely, he himself, sovereign as he was, or his descendants would change places with the pilgrim and sojourner, and need protection at his hand, or at the hand of his children.

[1] 1 Sam. xx. 12, &c. [2] Ibid. xxiv. 21, 22.

With Herod's dread therefore, lest God's incarnate Son, the new-born King of the Jews, might snatch the sceptre from his hand, but without Herod's deadly malignity of purpose, he sought to make Abraham his friend. Such at least was the unworthy fear of the second Abimelech and his people towards Isaac and his family of privilege and blessedness.[1]

Be this surmise however just or unfounded; be it that Abimelech came in sincerity of heart, and with some spiritual motive to demand Abraham's friendship, and to secure it by the awful sanction of an oath, or, in something of Balak's mind when he so miserably overrated wicked Balaam's power to bless or ban, "*I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed;*"[2] we still discover the secret, but commanding influence exercised upon the minds of others, by simplicity and godly sincerity in the believer's walk; and the desire, felt or expressed, stifled or admitted, wrestled down or yielded unto, of being partaker of his privileges and happiness and religion. "*Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.*"[3]

Abraham is not here brought before our

[1] See Gen. xxvi. [2] Numb. xx. 6. [3] Ibid. xxiii. 10.

notice, as a mighty temporal prince, whose armies might command respect, and whose alliance it might be well to gain;—not as a profound philosopher, whose wisdom might amaze or direct, mystify or instruct mankind; not as a theoretical examiner into religious truth, whose systems and speculations might dazzle simpler minds; but as the humble follower of Jehovah, as a man of practical holiness and piety, who daily and habitually walked with God. And every one who names the name of Jesus, as the refuge and rest of his soul,—every one whose spirit hath peace in the Atonement, hope in the Righteousness, and rejoicing in the finished Salvation of Immanuel, be the field of duty and observance which he occupies small or great, be the deposit into his stewardship one talent or ten, hath, like Abraham, the opportunity of becoming a blessing to others, and making them own, "God is with thee."

To persons beginning to inquire the way to Zion, who have learned that there is a reality of good and privilege, as well as of self-denial and needful duty in religion, the weight of consistent character on the part of those who are more mature and advanced in spiritual life, may be unspeakably momentous. It is a rally-

ing point in difficulty; it is a standard set up by the Spirit of the Lord, when the enemy may be coming in like a flood. It resembles Abraham's altar in Canaan, a beacon-blaze of light from heaven, to point out a way of life and peace; it is God's witness of his love, in exhibiting the beauty of holiness, that it may meekly and mildly win hearts to him. It is the call of Moses to Hobab, "*We are journeying towards the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you, come thou with us, and we will do thee good.*" [1] By the example of Christian life and conduct, the Holy Ghost not unfrequently takes of the things of Christ, and shews them to others. The believer is an epistle known and read of all men: and thousands, won by a beautiful exhibition of Christian graces in those who kept the noiseless tenor of their way, thinking themselves unobserved in their walk through the vale of humility, have taken hold as it were of their skirt, and cried, "*We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.*" [2] Thousands, I say, have so read that plain and intelligible epistle of practical holiness, illustrating purity of faith in the sons and

[1] Numb. x. 20. [2] Zech. viii. 23.

daughters of the Lord Almighty, that seeing God with them of a truth, they have been overruled to cast in a lot with them, and glorify the common Saviour, in the day of their gracious visitation.

Even they whom the god of this world still holds in the fetters of unbelief, ignorance, prejudice, and hardness of heart, have been smitten between the joints of the harness, by such intelligible instances of the power of God—by such arrows from the quiver of practical holiness. They have often yielded homage, unwillingly wrung from them in the outset. They have often sought the patronage of men, whom once they openly professed to despise. They have often besought the prayers of those, whom they once stigmatized as visionary enthusiasts; and have felt not unwilling that their wants should be represented before the mercy seat of God, by lips which they once scorned as those of mere unmeaning babblers. The countenance, the advice, the assistance of the humblest followers of Jesus, have in instances more numerous than will ever be imagined, until the revelations of that day when the Light of the world shall come again in his glory, been anxiously sought; and the triumph of meek-

ness, purity, love, and that wisdom which the Holy Ghost teacheth, over the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God, has been complete. The bended knee in secret, the full heart's intercession in the privacy of the closet, the simplicity of a heavenly conversation, and of affections set on things above, tend to the same effect in a private Christian's pilgrimage that the beloved disciple had in view when he wrote his first epistle, that they into whose hands it came, might have fellowship with him, and with his brethren in the apostleship, whose communion was with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. It is not by curious and unprofitable speculation, by zeal for mere circumstantials, by doctrinal accuracy—the bones, and sinews, and flesh, and skin, of the everlasting gospel, without the breath and beauty of a living soul, infused into it by the Spirit of God, that men are won into the paths of salvation, when they look to find them in the examples of their neighbours. The gate that opens into this way of blessedness moves on other hinges. And what are they? Surely a constant and graceful conformity between profession and practice, in those who name the name of Jesus—a religion which exercises its mild, but unvarying and

supreme control, over all the secular, not less than the spiritual concerns of life—a religion which reconciles, and indeed combines the employment of Martha with the devotion of Mary.

Continuing our view of this portion of the divine word, we notice

II. THE HOLY SINCERITY OF A BELIEVER'S LOVE.

It is of all the graces that reflect the image of the Son of God in the heart of his disciple, the most watchful and unslumbering. It has its impulse from his power, its constant example from his walk; it is, in short, the transfusion of his own mind into the mind of his followers and friends. And as the love of the believer's Prototype never failed, from his incarnation to his resurrection; as it never will fail through all ages of the Church, in whose behalf He conducts unceasingly the gracious work of an intercessory priesthood, so is Christian love that grace, which they, who are as He was in the world, and who yearn to be like-minded with Him at the Father's right hand, delight to cultivate; because it is not only a duty, but a privilege of their faith.

It is exhibited by Abraham

(1.) *In his readiness to take the oath required*

by Abimelech. The king said unto him, "Swear unto me here by God, that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear." Thus adjured, since the oath involved nothing unlawful,—since it would be for confirmation an end of all strife—since it would most amply give security to Abimelech, that one who entertained such awful views of the majesty and omniscience of Jehovah, as did his servant and friend, would never violate that oath, he scruples not to bind it upon his soul. It brought him into no bondage, connected him with no dangerous consequences, embarrassed him by no possibility of circumstances, wherein his obligations Godward might militate against his oath; as Herod's duty to Christ's messenger the Baptist placed him in irreconcileable contradiction with his rash vow to Herodias—and induced him to take refuge in murder, from what he deemed the disgraceful guilt of perjury. To Abraham the oath was unnecessary: but if it lulled the alarm of Abimelech, and gave him repose, it was expedient. It bound him to

nothing more than the civil obedience of a subject to his sovereign, whereof as a believer he felt the sacred obligation; and to the fulfilment of kindness, which the law of love, that glowed so warmly in his heart would make his delight. It was an act of holy courtesy and kindness thus to meet the wishes of Abimelech. He knew by that vision where the horror of great darkness fell upon him that his posterity would not inherit Canaan until four hundred years should pass away. He might therefore safely promise the king of Gerar, not to molest his descendants, even unto the third generation. He has a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man in this transaction; and it is done at once.

A confirmed Christian will often have to encounter the fears, or prejudices, the ignorance or suspicions of weaker brethren. Is he then sternly to take his ground of higher experience in the school of heavenly wisdom, and not to condescend to those of a lower form? Is he to measure every man by his own standard—to make his own opinions, like the tyrant's bed, upon which every wretch must be mutilated that he may fit it? Is he thus to lay a stumbling block in his weak brother's way, when

he might lend him a hand, blessed of God, to lead him onward to some acquaintance with his own better and clearer experience? Is he not called upon by that Master, whose example he must imitate, while he cleaves for salvation to his cross, to instruct others, as they are able to bear it; not to feed them with strong meat, while yet their spiritual digestion and power of spiritual assimilation can only enable them to use milk? If he would make the Gospel beautiful, and exhibit its spirit in a form as attractive, as it is intelligible, he is so commanded. When a professor of religion has outstripped Paul in the race after conformity with God, he may then hold the Apostle's conduct light and needless, "*I have become all things to all men, if that by any means I might win some*"[1]—and that too without the compromise of any fraction of holy principle, however minute. The condescension of Christian love is irresistible. It was the mediatorial glory of the Eternal Word, that when "*He was rich He became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich,*"[2] His meekness and lowliness, his patience and forbearance, his tender allowances to the carnal

[1] 1 Cor. x. 22. [2] 2 Cor. viii. 9.

views and misunderstandings of his disciples bowed and bound their hearts unto him. The same spirit, living and breathing in every page of his Gospel, hath won unnumbered hearts to his service. And they who would advance his gracious kingdom by instrumentally leading men to the glad obedience of faith, must walk in the holy readiness of love, even as He walked.

By some commentators, the oxen and sheep given to Abimelech are supposed to have been meant for sacrifice, when the covenant was stricken between them. Others imagine them to have been the ordinary gift on Abraham's part, wherewith even at this day in the East, parties begin their intercourse with a present, be it of dates or diamonds. A third class suppose them to have been set apart for an expression of homage paid to Abimelech as lord of the land. But why, it may be asked, upon the last supposition, does Abraham, who holds that lordship over the country, by God's own donation, (the highest and most unchallengeable of all tenures,) pay homage and tribute? Simply because the time of actual delivery was not yet come. Abraham was lord of the land in *hope*, but not in *possession*. Thus the Lord of the temple wrought a miracle to pay the half

shekel, while yet in very truth He was exempted by the highest of all exemptions from that liability. "*Render therefore to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.*" [1]

The seven ewe lambs were undoubtedly meant as a price paid by Abraham to Abimelech for the well of water; in order that holding it thus from him, by a kind of feudal payment, he might in time to come have no dispute with the people, but possess and enjoy it by a tenure confessedly good and just in law.

But the holy sincerity of a believer's love is shewn by Abraham,—

(II.) *In the honesty of his reproof to Abimelech.*

"He rebuked him, (or reasoned with him,) because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away." As a solemn covenant was to be made between them, it was meet and right, that all causes of dispute and misunderstanding should be mentioned, corrected, and removed. It is the office of love —a needful though a painful office—an office

[1] Rom. xiii. 17.

of true tenderness, not to suffer sin upon our brother; but meekly, gently, and in something of that goodness which was continually poured forth from the full and fathomless depths of the Saviour' compassion, to reprove what we know to be amiss; what that modest charity which steps backwards, without looking backwards to throw its garment of pity over a brother's nakedness, yet feels needful to correct —"considering ourselves, lest we also should be tempted." Such a temper is widely different from that cynical tone of mind which makes so many who know not what spirit they are of, delight in the opportunities of fault-finding. It is as different indeed, as nature from grace, humility from pride, and the requirement of holy duty from the suggestions of self-complacency. Christian lowliness and modesty would shrink from the task of reproof, as one which may seem ungracious: but a sense of responsibility will not suffer the child of God to please himself and be silent. He will be gentle in the task, as a nurse with her children; but he will be firm in discharging an office which faithfulness to souls may impose upon him; as the surgeon mourns inwardly over the pain occasioned by his knife, but uses it steadily the while, con-

vinced of his patient's need, and of the benevolence of his own purpose.

1. Is it now asked to what principle (subordinate to the ruling power of faith) we may attribute these excellences in the character of Abraham? I answer, to that habitual connexion of every thing with God, which the last verse but one in the chapter records for our instruction. "*Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.*"[1] The worship of his Almighty Shield, his all-sufficient Helper, his exceeding great Reward is never forgotten. The grove is planted; and no doubt throws in due time its broad and refreshing shade over the altar, whereupon is shed that sacrificial blood, by which was shadowed forth the all-meritorious oblation of the Lamb of God. His religion is inseparably intertwined with the great doctrine of atonement, which is the groundwork of all prayer, all worship, all praise, all hope, all confidential approach to God. O let us not be told that we may preach that doctrine too frequently, or too anxiously, or too importunately to the hearts of men. If there be one

[1] Gen. xxi. 33.

truth of God, which more than another (where all are infinitely precious) should be inculcated in season and out of season, it is surely that great doctrine, the central sun that pours the light of life—the central force that preserves the harmony of the whole system of salvation, and around which every duty, every grace, every virtue that unites to complete and perfect the believer revolves at God's appointment. We do not mean that Christ crucified should be preached as an insulated truth; but as the mighty, supreme, and all-pervading influence that gives life and energy to man's obedience. And while according to his poor ability, helped, as the Spirit of God may help him by holy study in the book of life, prayer for divine illumination, and practical application of its blessed truth to his own soul, the minister of Christ endeavours to set forth the Atonement, in its length and breadth, and depth and height of love, and in its mighty cogency of obligation, he cannot do wrong, because he thus takes the motto of his great examplar in ministerial zeal and faithfulness—"*God forbid that I should glory, save only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" [1]

[1] Gal. vi. 14.

II. Abraham is a stranger and a pilgrim in the earth: but still he is permitted to sojourn in the land of the Philistines many days; probably indeed not less than six and twenty years. There shall be that truce to his present wanderings. And why? probably to refresh himself, to enable him to educate his son Isaac in holy preparation for the dew of heaven in the blessings of promise; and that he may awhile longer bear his testimony for God in the darkness of the country where he dwells. But his appointed time will pass away, his duties there will be fulfilled, and he must go thence. He knows this, and therefore dwells not in a ceiled house, but in a tent, easily taken down and removed. He rests awhile in faith; he is ready to depart in hope, for he relies on the promise, "*looking for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.*"[1] Even so do Abraham's seed, the members and heritage of Christ. Having believed, they enter even here into some temporary rest. But as the ark had its staves always fixed in their rings, ready to be taken up, when the pillar of fire and of cloud should give its signal of removal, so is it with

[1] Heb. xi. 10.

the Christian. This is not his rest, for it is polluted; and the voice will come to cry, "Arise and depart hence." Zealous for his divine Master, while he stays, yet ready and willing to be gone, he redeems the time, and lives with his eye fixed on that unchanging blessedness which awaits him in the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. He knows that if his earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, he has a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Where his treasure is, there is his heart also. He is a brief sojourner on earth, a pilgrim, rapidly passing through its wilderness, or its more pleasant places; but his portion both for time and for eternity, is the everlasting God, upon whom he calls, even Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. "*To him to live is Christ, to die is gain.*" [1]

[1] Phil. i. 21.

SERMON XXXIII.

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC.

GENESIS XXII. 1, 2.

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Ahraham and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

It has been remarked, not more quaintly than truly, that when man builds himself a nest, God in gracious wisdom plants a thorn in it, lest his shortsighted and unthinking creature, allured by its warmth and softness, should cower too closely in it, when he should be pluming and spreading his wings for a heavenward flight. The statement is verified in Abraham's experience. He had now dwelt in Beersheba many days, probably indeed until Isaac was twenty-five, or

as some imagine, three and thirty years old;[1] and had been taught by holy precept and example, to know the Lord God of his father. The time seems to have passed peacefully and happily away. Abraham had perhaps begun to nestle down amidst his family endearments; and therefore he must feel the sharpness of the thorn, in order that he may not mistake his pilgrimage for his rest. "*Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.*"[2] God had only one Son without sin: but even that eternally-beloved of his Father was not without a cross. The children of the Most High are indeed often nearest to their hour of sorrow, when they least expect it. "*In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour, Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled.*"[3] The believer therefore, hath need to watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation: or, finding it overtake him, that he may have a resting place and comfort for his soul, a sanctuary provided by the

[1] Such is the opinion of the learned Lightfoot, who founds his supposition upon the type and antitype in respect of age, such a correspondence having been found to exist in so many other circumstances.

[2] Heb. xii. 6. [3] Ps. xxx. 6, 7.

God of peace, whither he may betake himself, as the manslayer to the city of refuge.

Instead however of following out the train of thought which these opening remarks suggest, the considerations may become more pointed and practical, by connecting them with this portion of Abraham's history, and noticing,

I. THE GREAT TRIAL OF THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL IN GOD'S COMMAND.

"*It came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham.*" But have we not, it may be asked, in another portion of the Bible, (equally a revelation of truth by the Holy Ghost,) a special injunction, that "*no man should say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed?*"[1] Even so: and yet Abraham is tempted of God. And if in the unnumbered instances of human trial, it could be said of a saint of Jehovah, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation," that saint was Abraham. Temptation, in the simple meaning of the word, is trial, examination, proof, which may become

[1] James i. 12, 13.

the food or the poison, the exercise or the destruction of him whom it befalls. It may denote in the tempter, a malignant design of leading its object into sin, for the destruction of his soul; for which end the pure and holy God could never send it; else would He be the Author of sin, perfect, and sin-hating as He is, a contradiction monstrous and irreconcileable. It may be a trial commissioned by divine wisdom and love, to show unto man the principles of natural corruption on the one hand, and of divine grace on the other; both of which may need the hand of God, to reach their depths within the heart, and bring them to the surface, so that they may both appear to him who endures the trial. We know not the power and strength of God's Arm, nor the sufficiency of his Almighty and ever ready grace, until we compare our own weakness, with the overwhelming force of a stern and heavy trial. Nor until we measure our feebleness with the might of the giants that beset us, and feel that we are grasshoppers in our own sight, shall we flee to trust in the Lord for ever; thus learning, by gracious and happy experience, that in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. In such temptations, the immediate assault may come from

God, with a purpose in perfect harmony with the immensity of his gracious love, as it came to Abraham. In other cases the determination of his sovereignty may providentially make way for the assaults of Satan; as Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness, there to be tempted of the Devil. And why? simply that Satan's defeat, and Immanuel's victory might be made conspicuous by Him, "*who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Think it not strange*" then, Christians, "*concerning the fiery trial that is to try you; as though some strange thing had happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall appear, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy,*"[1] In pursuing the subject, I notice,

(I.) THE CHARACTER OF THE TRIAL.

Every word of God's announcement, was to Abraham, like that sword which was in future time to pierce through Mary's heart, for the suffering, agony, and death of her Son, according to the flesh, her Lord and Saviour according to the covenant of grace. Every word was one of emphatic sorrow: and the

[1] 1 Peter iv. 12.

whole, to any other heart than one of faith, securely resting upon the truth of God, must have smitten it with exquisite misery. Take now *thy son*,—the son of thine *old age*,—the son of *God's especial miracle* to thee and Sarah, —thine *only Son*,—for Ishmael is cast out by a divine command, from being a posterity, according to the divine will, and Isaac alone remains,—thy son *whom thou lovest*, over whom thine heart yearns with undivided tenderness and affection,—and, (worst of all, to a believer in Jesus, in whose eye that child of promise was immeasurably dearer than he could be in connexion with any mere human feelings, however pure and deep their sources,) the son *through whom the world's Deliverer could be alone expected:* for if God were true, and Isaac died childless, it were utterly vain to expect the world's salvation. Jehovah, who had pledged Himself to effect human redemption by Isaac,—who had promised that he should be a principal link in the golden chain that connected Abraham with God manifested in the flesh, demanded the sacrifice. He then, to whom the promises were made,—he to whose heart those engagements were the deepest and holiest joy, was to undertake the terrible office

of this priesthood; to get him into the land of Moriah, and with his own hand, to offer Isaac there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains of which God would give him notice. He who read and knew what was in the heart of man, was well aware that Abraham's faith might lay hold on God's Almightiness, or the requirement would have been impossible to flesh and blood. One lust may often strive against another in the human heart, and indeed in the heart of him who desires to perfect holiness in the fear of God. But in this dark and mysterious instance, one grace seems to be called into the lists against another,—the grace of *faith* in God's promise, is apparently armed against the grace of *obedience* to God's absolute command. And where shall the mediator in such a strife be found? Whither shall Abraham look for that days-man who may lay his hand upon both, and reconcile them together. Yet surely, if the promise and the command do not meet together,—if the grace of faith, and the grace of obedience do not kiss each other, Abraham shall never see the day of the Son of man: nor shall God in human form and flesh purchase the Church with His own blood: nor shall the herald of

mercy point to Him, and say, "Behold the Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world!"

In the case of Ishmael, a valid reason was given why he should be removed from his father's house; but the Lord is absolutely silent why Isaac should be sacrificed, alleges no cause, promises no substitute, hints no hope that a ram shall be caught in the thicket, nor Jehovah be seen in the Mount for a rescue. The command is however absolute, and imperative. At the very moment when Abraham probably expected from the call of his Almighty Friend some new manifestation of divine love and goodness to himself and to his family, God sounds the depth, and measures the height, of his servant's devotedness, with a line and rule, such as had never yet been applied to human frailty, however mightily upheld of God, since man was made upon the earth. As we are carried down the tide of sacred history, we hear David's passionate grief for the loss of a rebellious child. Would it then be wonderful, if in circumstances of immeasurably greater sorrow—called to sacrifice the delight of his eyes, the hope of his age, the promise of a universal and everlasting blessedness to lost mankind,—

Abraham, instead of obeying the command, should go forth weeping, and say, as he goes, 'O my son Isaac, my son, my son Isaac, would God I could die for thee, O Isaac, my son, my son!'

If Abraham had closed the ear of faith, and listened only with that of sense, (for both can by no possibility be opened together) when God delivered this message, reasons why it should not be obeyed would have occurred to him with irresistible power. He might have answered, (and the reply would have found an echo in every man's natural wisdom and natural affections,) "such a command is utterly impossible to be regarded: it would be a sin against humanity, nay, it would be foul and flagrant dishonour to God, should I obey it. There is a positive canon of the Most High Himself against it—"*Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.*"[1] The friend of Jehovah therefore, cannot be called forth to become the murderer of his own son. I am here a witness for God, for the truth and beauty of his religion; for the pure and holy morality of his faith—for the blameless life of one who

[1] Gen. ix. 6.

professes to have received the Atonement. I shall therefore tremendously compromise the honour of my Lord, by lifting a hand against the life of my child. I shall bring an eternal reproach upon myself and Him; and make religion an utter abomination in the sight of the heathen. Isaac is not mine alone, but Sarah's also; her life is bound up in the life of the lad. She will die with horror at such an act. She will detest the unfeeling husband, the unnatural father; and I shall bring down her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. This sacrifice would nullify all that hath been promised; and make the God of truth Himself a liar. "*How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?*"[1] Surely either this command is a delusion, or the very engagements of God, whereon my hopes, and his honour are built, must be as fleeting as the morning cloud or the early dew, instead of being unchangeable and imperishable as Himself." Thus Abraham might have reasoned: thus every man who consults with flesh and blood, instead of taking counsel from God, must reason. And thus multitudes at this day with God's

[1] Gen. xxxix. 9.

own message by his word in one scale, and the small dust of a miserable expediency in the other, regard the Bible as light and worthless. It is weighed in the balances of their infidelity, and found wanting.

No instance of resurrection from the dead had yet occurred upon earth. Might Abraham then hope, that if he slew his son, and consumed his ashes upon the altar, God would bring to pass a new thing in the world? But whatever tide of objection natural feelings might pour forth,—whatever armies of opposition, unbelief might muster,—whatever specious difficulties a man who chooses to sit in judgment upon a divine command, instead of beseeching God to subdue his heart to its obedience, might invent,—all are removed at once, like clouds of night before the rising sun, or as Satan fled from the Saviour's presence, when He foiled every temptation with that sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Abraham's lowly submission, is unalloyed with one repining exclamation. We know not indeed, that even a murmuring thought hath entrance and lodgment in his heart. If there were language at all, it was doubtless that used by his mysterious descendant, in the unimaginable agony of the

garden. "*Father, if this cup may not pass from Me except I drink it, thy will be done.*"[1]

This trial was suited to the maturity of Abraham's experience in the divine life; and therefore was not laid upon him at an earlier period of his walk with God. There is love in the rod, love in the mode, and love in the time of its infliction. He who led not his people, newly brought from their bondage, by the way of the Philistines, though that was near, lest peradventure they should repent when they saw war, and return to Egypt, would not demand a sacrifice like this, until his servant was strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, until He had Himself taught his soldier's hands to war, and practised his fingers in the fight. The wheat can now abide the fan, and therefore may be laid upon the winnowing floor. Are any of you placed in the furnace; and doth the flame burn fiercely? Believe that God hath watched the fittest opportunity. Believe that if the temptation had come one moment earlier, it would have come too soon. Believe "*that the trial of your faith being much more precious than that of gold that perisheth,*

[1] Matt. xxvi. 42.

though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the coming of Jesus Christ." [1]

There is no place for a moment's hesitation in Abraham's mind. The horror of great darkness that fell long ago upon him, had nothing so dreadful as this command, itself alone considered. But his feet are shod with the preparation of the peace of God, and impelled by love. He arose therefore, early in the morning to seek the appointed place, and do the mournful bidding of God. His heart is established, and does not shrink through the long trial of his three days journey. His resolution never falters, even when Isaac asks the heart-rending question, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering." The altar is built; the wood is laid in order; Isaac—the lamb whom Jehovah demanded is bound and cast upon it; and even then there is no quailing, no pleading against the imminent act of sacrifice, against the uplifted stroke, that when it falls smites his child to death. Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. O blessed

[1] 1 Peter i. 7.

and Almighty power of God, at once to subdue, and uphold the tried and tempted soul! He walks in the furnace and treads its depth of flame unharmed; for the form of Him who walks with his saints is the form of the Son of God.

In this crisis of his fate, and of the fate of Isaac, we turn to notice

(II.) *Abraham's support under his most trying dispensation.* And be it remembered, that as no call upon our obedience more stern and fearful than this can be imagined, so we may be assured, that no similar strength and comfort will be denied to those who seek it in more common experiments of their faith. We have seen no resistance, heard no murmuring; every opposing feeling of his mind, and every struggling affection of his heart, however agonizing was the nature of the dispensation, is tranquillized, and lies slumbering, as calmly and placidly as an infant upon its mother's breast. Whence then is derived the mighty influence, whereby this victory has been won, and this full surrender made? This is the victory that overcometh all, even his faith. His name is high in the file of those honoured elders, who through faith obtained a good report of the

Holy Ghost. "*By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son; of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*" [1] Behold the mighty and unslumbering keeper of Abraham's peace, amidst every conflict; his support under the otherwise crushing weight of God's requirement; the high impulse which moved him to a sacrifice, otherwise impossible. In vain is every other pleading, in vain the apparent cruelty of the command, its apparent inconsistency with the character of God, and all the laws of duty. In vain would unbelief suggest the dark and dreary hopelessness of himself, his wife, and above all, of a lost world, if this sacrifice be consummated. Ishmael is gone, Isaac must die. Abraham may say, "*If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.*" [2] Even a world may perish, if Isaac die; and there is no light, especially enkindled for this emergency, to reach beyond his grave. Still, the bidding is positive, and Abraham is a

[1] Heb. xi. 17—19. [2] Gen. xliii. 14.

believer. How is this? Faith is a long-sighted grace. Light cannot penetrate to the depths of the sea, and discover what is hidden there. It cannot discover what lies at the earth's centre. But faith can see God behind the darkest cloud. Faith can realize and rest upon divine assurances, when the means of their fulfilment seem impossible. It can hope against hope, for the birth of a child. It can believe against sense, when there seems no ray of light, that the child so wondrously born, and then so mysteriously demanded shall be spared. "The fig tree may not blossom, neither may fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no meat; the flocks may be cut off from the fold, and there may be no herd in the stalls:" but the tried believer, however great his exercise of faith hath still ground to "rejoice in the Lord, and to joy in the God of his salvation."

God has undertaken that Isaac shall have the promise and the promised Seed: and "*God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it: or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?*"[1] Isaac was born by

[1] Numb. xxiii. 19.

miracle; and if he dies, a miracle shall raise him again from the dead. The knife cannot slay him, the fire cannot consume him—the wind, scattering his ashes over the face of the earth, cannot carry him beyond the reviving power of Jehovah. Abraham therefore lays the truth and power of his covenant God to heart; opposes them, together with the promise resting upon them, to every reasoning of carnal unbelief; leaves his home, takes his son, journies towards Mount Moriah, and prepares unshrinkingly to perform an act of faith, such as the world had never seen; and such as (the consummation of that great sacrifice for transgression upon Calvary excepted) the world shall never see.

Mark the power of that faith in Abraham's address to the young men whom he left at the foot of the mountain. "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." Was this a pious fraud, to hinder their interference, against a purpose which to them must have appeared equally monstrous and unintelligible? No: it was the full expectation of a faith that towered upwards to the throne of God's Truth and Almightiness: and there learned, there accounted, decided,

upon the best and surest grounds, that "*God was able to raise Isaac from the dead, from which also he had received him in a figure*,"[1] at his birth: and whence also by a reception of the same blessed figure, he was about to receive him again, in his virtual resurrection. The same eye which once looked through a dead womb, now looks through a bleeding sword to the power of God. "*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith giving glory to God: being fully persuaded, that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.*"[2] He knows, in his inmost soul (for there the Holy Ghost witnesses to the truth of God) that he shall worship, that he shall come again with the lad to the young men. Past mercies testify to present truth; experience combines with faith to attest the unchangeable fidelity of God: and Abraham hath peace, if not joy in believing. Such is the privivilege of every child of God. His faith may look beyond itself, beyond all opposition; beyond all combination of improbabilities, beyond all those objections which reason cannot answer, nor strength repel: and be fixed upon Him

[1] Heb. xi. 19. [2] Rom. iv. 20.

with whom all things are possible. And thrice blessed is he who can thus stay himself upon the promise and power of God. No valley of trouble will be to him without a door of hope; no barren wilderness without manna; no dry rock without water; no dungeon without light; no fiery trial without comfort: because he hath the same word, and the same God whereon to trust, whose power opened the sea, as a door to be a passage from Egypt to Canaan, who fed Israel in the desert with bread from heaven, and water from the rock; who filled Peter's prison with a flaming light, who made Shadrach, Mesech, and Abednego, to walk to and fro in the fiery furnace, with joy and safety.[1] Jesus said, "*Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*"[2]

In a world of conflict and unrest, while "without are fightings, and within are fears," it is among the dearest and most delightful refreshments of the heart to lay hold of that

[1] Spurstowe's Wells of Salvation Opened, p. 57.
[2] John xi. 39.

assurance, "*There hath no temptation befallen you, but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation also make a way for you to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"[1] The promise was verified in

(III.) *Abraham's deliverance and gracious reward.*

Abraham had stretched out his hand, and taken the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the Lord, Jehovah the everlasting Angel of the everlasting covenant, called unto him out of heaven, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." Did the omniscient God at this time first learn the purity and power of that living spring of faith which his own hand had opened in Abraham's heart, otherwise hard and flinty as the rock in Horeb? No—but this faith had now been proved; its blessed simplicity brought to the test; and the approbation awarded. God never accepted more than one human sacrifice

[1] 1 Cor. x. 13.

with blood; though He must have the thank-offering of every believer—the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, an unbloody oblation of gratitude to his grace. Abraham had only slain Isaac in his intention, not in reality: but he hath the praise of an actual accomplishment and consummation of that awful injunction. And now since Jehovah could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself—(an oath, whereby in the unimaginable condescension of his grace, He hath bound and engaged Himself also to the heirs of salvation—to every one of us instated into the family of life and love,) that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie—his promise and his oath, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us. The blessing is not only confirmed, but enlarged: and every one of the spiritual seed of Abraham may realize it, hath realized it, and shall realize it for ever.

As this is the greatest, so it is the last of Abraham's trials. Except when Sarah descends into the grave, as a shock of corn ripe in its season, his old age is unmarked with further sorrow. The plowers plow no more upon his back, nor make long their furrows. His life

flows on in a calm tranquil current, until its close; when he may depart in peace, having seen with his eyes the salvation of God. The fire of affliction shall not injure the children of the Highest, when they tread the furnace depths in obedience to his call, by faith in his name; and with one overruling desire for his glory. Nor shall they always walk upon the fiery floor, and be canopied with its flame, trying as it must be, though powerless to harm them. The finger of divine providence is already pointing to the hour of deliverance; and the voice of the Great King will ere long be heard, "*Ye servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come hither.*"[1] Wherefore, comfort yourselves, my afflicted brethren in the faith and patience of Jesus Christ with these words.

Among the many inferences that crowd upon the mind from this instructive part of the divine word, one or two only must suffice.

I. *The absolute sovereignty of God over all that we are, and all that we have.* Isaac is given in an especial manner to Abraham to be his dearest individual solace, and his highest joy as head of the faithful. Yet at the very moment

[1] Dan. iii. 26.

when every affection of his soul, short of that towards God, and even many of those affections whereby Isaac bound him to God, as the medium of a promised Saviour, were arrayed in opposition against the mysterious and terrible announcement, Isaac is suddenly and positively demanded. How may these things be? It is surely lawful for God to do what He will with his own. If we are his, not by creation merely, not merely may I add by the most precious purchase of his blood—but also by the glad and gracious surrender of our hearts to Him, under the summoning and subduing power of his almighty grace, He hath a Sovereign's and a Father's right over us and ours; over our temporal comforts, and our spiritual privilege. Our Isaacs may be precious to us, but they cannot be too precious to resign into his hands when He sees fit to claim them. "Lord, increase our faith;" that we may surrender them willingly, if Thou claim them. Lord, increase our faith, to say, Thy will be done. Lord, increase our faith to cry, "*The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; and blessed be the name of the Lord.*"[1]

[1] Job i. 21.

But unto this magnanimity in the divine life there must be a gracious renewal of the mind unto holiness. The Saviour may issue the same command to the young man, and to the disciples, to forsake all and follow Him. To the one however, it will be intolerably irksome, to the other a comparatively easy yoke; because nature reigns in the former, and the grace of God hath dominion in the latter. Let God address an unconverted man, as He spake to Abraham, "Offer up now, not thy *son*, but thy *sin*, thy Herodias, thy Dalilah." Will he bind it, will he take the knife, will he slay it unshrinkingly? No he cannot spare it, he cannot part with it. "This is a hard saying, who can bear it?" But as He who spared not his own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will with Him freely give us all things, so He who has surrendered his heart to God hath nothing that he would keep back. "*Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee.*"[1]

II. *The youthful Christian may be often a great and needful help to those of more advancement and maturity in religious experience.* Isaac was now arrived at the time of life when

[1] Psalm lxxiii. 25.

his bodily vigour must have made it impossible that Abraham could have bound him, laid him upon the altar, and slain him with the sacrificial knife against his will. But when God's demand, and Abraham's purpose were made known to him, did he resist, did he question, did he plead, did he endeavour to persuade? No: he sees God in the requirement by the same full assurance of faith, wherewith Abraham beheld Him; he clings by faith as closely to the promise in this dark hour, as did his stedfast father. He perhaps encourages his father, strengthens his hand, and nerves his heart. The sacrifice must be voluntary, if it be acceptable, and Isaac entreats Abraham to do, what Abraham would still have done, even if he had attempted to dissuade him. The confirmation of the patriarch's faith must have been thus vastly enlarged. And so may the trying path of elder disciples be smoothed, and their feet quickened in painful duties, when they see the grace of God in their juniors; see them rather beckoning onwards, than drawing backwards. It is a powerful, as well as a delightful call unto parental faith and obedience, when a gracious child leads the way in happy submission to the will of God; bears a father's or a mother's burdens of holy trial con-

cerning them, and animates a drooping father or mother to fight the good fight of faith, by his own modest, yet unshrinking courage in the conflict. May God give to every Christian parent, Abraham's faith! And may the same God bestow upon every believing parent, Abraham's divinely courageous and devoted child!

III. I close the subject with a brief remark upon the *apparent discrepancy between St. Paul and St. James, partly in reference to this transaction.* The apostle of the Gentiles saith, *If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt: but to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness.*"[1] Abraham then is held as justified in God's eye freely, and without reference to his active obedience. The apostolic bishop of Jerusalem on the other hand asks, "*Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he*

[1] Rom. iv. 3—5.

had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou, how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God."[1] The appeal of James is made to those who quoted Abraham's privilege as a believer freely justified; but yet would not follow the example of Abraham, in the exercise of a faith evidencing and approving itself by sacrifices of holy obedience. His faith influenced his conduct and was connected with practical devotedness to God's will, in a circumstance of unexampled trial. His faith therefore was made perfect by works; as the goodness of a tree is not perfect, without bringing forth its appropriate fruits. In other words, the faith whereby Abraham was justified, when he believed God, was one which afterwards evidenced itself by works when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar.[2] "*Ye see then how that by works* in this plain and simple sense of God's inspired word, *a man is justified, and not by faith only. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*"[3]

[1] James ii. 21.

[2] Professor Scholefield's Sermon on St. Paul and St. James reconciled, p. 12.

[3] Ibid. ii. 24.

SERMON XXXIV.

ABRAHAM A TYPE OF GOD THE FATHER. ISAAC A TYPE OF GOD THE SON.

GENESIS XXII. 6—10.

AND ABRAHAM TOOK THE WOOD OF THE BURNT OFFERING, AND LAID IT UPON ISAAC HIS SON; AND HE TOOK THE FIRE IN HIS HAND, AND A KNIFE; AND THEY WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER. AND ISAAC SPAKE UNTO ABRAHAM HIS FATHER, AND SAID, MY FATHER: AND HE SAID, HERE AM I, MY SON. AND HE SAID, BEHOLD THE FIRE AND THE WOOD; BUT WHERE IS THE LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING? AND ABRAHAM SAID, MY SON, GOD WILL PROVIDE HIMSELF A LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING: SO THEY WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER. AND THEY CAME TO THE PLACE WHICH GOD HAD TOLD THEM OF. AND ABRAHAM BUILT AN ALTAR THERE, AND LAID THE WOOD IN ORDER, AND BOUND ISAAC HIS SON, AND LAID HIM ON THE ALTAR UPON THE WOOD. AND ABRAHAM STRETCHED FORTH HIS HAND, AND TOOK THE KNIFE TO SLAY HIS SON.

A STUDENT of the Bible may be compared to a person travelling through a pleasant and fertile country. The wayfaring man follows a path abounding in every part with natural beauty,

well fitted to delight him, if he has an eye to discern, and a heart to feel it. But occasionally he is led up some gentle ascent, from which a scene of unexpected, and unusual loveliness or grandeur bursts upon his view, filling him with astonishment and gladness. The way of a diligent and devout reader of God's holy word, lies through a spiritual garden, wherein is every thing pleasant to the sight, and good for food, equally exciting and refreshing. But lest even this paradise might pall upon his mind by continued uniformity, he is frequently conducted by the sacred narrative, as the hand of the Spirit leads him along it, up to some high ground, commanding a vast and varied extent of gracious and glorious manifestation; more than usually radiant with the features of divine love; well fitted to raise his mind much nearer to heaven, and give it closer communion with God, in the everlasting mercies of his Son.

Of such kind is the history now under consideration. We passed through a region of no common interest, while journeying together over the various circumstances of Abraham's temptation, in that emphatic trial of his faith, which bade him take Isaac, and offer him for a burnt-offering unto God. And I must have failed in

describing, and you must have been wanting in discernment, and all of us in a spirit of grace and supplication for holy teaching, if we passed that region uninstructed. Our way hath led us to the summit of Moriah. Upon that sacred mountain we are now standing. Look we then abroad, as God the Holy Ghost may enable us, upon the stupendous prospect that opens to us in *a Typical View of the mysterious, and most significant transaction already reviewed.* It presents us with two subjects especially demanding our devout contemplation: and if that contemplation be blessed from on high to our hearts, we shall eagerly exclaim, as the love of Christ constrains us all, 'What reward shall we render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto us? Lord, it is good for us to be here.'

The father and the son had each a part to perform in this figurative action, which has been registered for the instruction of the Church in all ages of its militant state: and there is a very remarkable, a very close, a very intimate similarity between Abraham and Isaac on the one hand, and the Eternal Father, and the Eternal Word made flesh on the other, in the awful scene before us. We regard then,

I. ABRAMAM'S CONDUCT, AS TYPIFYING THAT OF JEHOVAH THE FATHER.

Many are the instances of holy faith and zealous love displayed by this friend of God: but none more remarkable, none more unquestionable, none that sprang from a deeper source, or rose to a higher point of devotion, than the offering of his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and who was the desire of his eyes. Long expected before he came, and cherished when he was given, in the patriarch's heart of hearts, connected with every desire, the chief substance of every earthly joy, so far as the creature could provide it; and mingling himself with every hope as Isaac did, Abraham lived again in his son, with a joy dearer and more pure, than can well be imagined. Parental love may realize a part of this affection: and doubtless the history of this trial has drawn forth tears of parental sympathy in more instances than may be numbered. But a child given by miracle, as well as taught and sanctified by the grace of God; a child in whom Abraham embraced every promise of individual and general blessedness, as the son of God's undertaking for man's redemption, had claims upon his affection, with which no other could compete, save those

upon her who bare and cherished the Lord of glory. Yet did the grace of God enable the patriarch to wrestle down all his affections, without one sinew that shrunk in the severe conflict; and to resign his son at a requisition, which, coming from any other quarter than the sovereign authority of Jehovah, could not have been entertained for a moment; but must have been rejected with undissembled disgust. Who shall doubt the sincerity of Abraham's holy fear? Who shall question the intensity of Abraham's love towards God? Both are unchangeable, He withheld not his son, his only son from the demand; and so doing, he stands alone in the history of man, as the universal deluge has no parallel in the history of the material world.

"*But as a drop of water unto the sea, or as a gravel stone in comparison of the sand, so are a thousand years to the days of eternity.*"[1] Even such must be our estimate of Abraham's love towards God, in the resignation of his son to the divine will, compared with the immensity of God the Father's grace, in sending God the Son to become a man and a sacrifice. In

[1] Ecclus. xviii. 10.

Abraham's case, we may discover a motive for this heroic act of self-denial. He owed every thing to God, both in possession, and in hope. He was bound to obey the divine will by obligations the most imperative, and by cords of the strongest love. But what could be an impulse in the mind of God, counselling, and as it were compelling Him, to bestow the Son of his affection upon the world? "*It is no pleasure to the Almighty that we are righteous, it is no gain to Him that we make our way perfect.*" [1] And if it were, the guilty alienated race of men neither does nor desires to do his will, nor advance his kingdom, nor promote his glory. Yet, although the Word was the Son of his everlasting regard and complacency, lying in his bosom from an eternal generation, the sharer of his counsels, the reflection of his glory, the fulness of his perfections, the cherished of his ineffable paternal tenderness, and with whom his complacency, his bliss, his every purpose, is, has been, and shall be inseparably united, He does not scruple to resign Him to the urgent want and craving requirement of a lost word.

[1] Job xxii. 2.

Abraham gave up Isaac to a constant and unwearied Benefactor. The Father Everlasting resigned his Son to a race of creatures continually gainsaying and disobedient. If the act then of Abraham's piety was glorious, much more doth the act of divine philanthropy exceed in glory. "*God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life.*"[1] "*Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some will even dare to die: but God commended his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*"[2] "*Herein then is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*"[3] Oh where, among the hearts of the children of men, shall we dig to open the sources of a love, which would be willing to melt obdurate enmity by sprinkling the affections of him who indulged it, with the blood of a child resigned to death, in order to save that unprovoked hater alive? Yet this hath been done by our Father which is in heaven, and done for us. "*O the depth of the riches both*

[1] John iii. 16. [2] Rom. v. 7, 8. [3] 1 John ii. 2.

of the wisdom and goodness of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" [1] *"Bless the Lord, O our souls, and all that is within us, bless his holy name."* [2] *"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."* [3] These things the angels desire to look into; and they will be the song, and the rapture, and the wonder of the glorified, through never ending ages of light, and love, and blessedness. Did every natural affection of Abraham rise up in opposition to the demand of Isaac's oblation; and need some presiding impulse to wrestle with and subdue it? And may we not with reverence, speaking after the manner of men, imagine something as it were of a sacred reluctance on the part of God's paternal love, to dismiss his Son from an untainted sphere of bliss and glory, to a tabernacle of flesh, to an incarnation of suffering, to a death of shame and agony? Yet almighty grace, the grace of compassion and love overcame all; and made God delight himself in this astounding sacrifice. In this view, one reason why the Most High expressed his strong approbation of Abraham's holy surrender, might be its faint reflection and

[1] Rom. xi. 33. [2] Psalm ciii. 1. [3] 2 Cor. ix. 15.

resemblance of his own infinitely higher and more precious act of condescending and unmerited tenderness.

When Isaac saw the preparations for sacrifice, he cried, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" For Isaac was also a believer in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Abraham knew full well where it was to be found—that it was the one only lamb of his own fold, and of his own bosom: and he was fully prepared to consummate the sacrifice. "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering." The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ had no need to lock the same secret in his heart. He took counsel concerning it with his Son. The question was put, "*Whom shall we send, and who will go for us,*"[1] to redeem a guilty and ruined world? And the answer was given by the Son Himself. The Lamb was not far to seek: for He stood at the Father's right hand, lay in his bosom, shared all its secrets: and from thence He cried, "*Here am I, send me.*"[2]

Abraham and Isaac went both of them to-

[1] Isaiah vi. 8. [2] Ibid.

gether towards the appointed place of sacrifice. And is this apparently barren and indifferent passage a stony rock, out of which no honey can be extracted? Assuredly not. "As God the Father and Son, are never separated in their operations, so neither is the divine justice separated from the divine mercy. They go both of them together: both unite in this wonderful transaction of man's redemption. Believe we this, and we shall never despair: believe we this, and we shall never presume. Go, believer, to the cross of Christ; there thou wilt find "*mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissing each other.*"[1]

When Abraham's faith had been tested and purified in the furnace of this demand, the consummation of his sacrifice was spared. "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." But the Father of our Isaac, spared not thus either Himself or his son. "*It pleased the Lord to bruise Him.*"[2] "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son;" but the meditated

[1] Worgan on the Lessons, ii. 336. Psalm lxxxv. 10.

[2] Isalah liii. 10.

blow was staid by the mightier hand of the Angel Jehovah. Not so, when the Father cried, "*Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow.*"[1] No ram was caught in a thicket to be a substitute: for if the Lamb of God had not died, the world had died for ever. Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel were gathered together to perform the act of sacrifice; but God's hand and counsel had before determined it to be made. It was this relative position of the Father towards Him, as a Sentencer and Judge, more than the scourge, or the crown of thorns, or the nails, or the soldier's spear, or the Roman cross, that made the Redeemer's soul sorrowful unto death. A higher hand than might be put back, executing a deeper counsel of love than might be understood, brought the unsinning spirit of our Immanuel to more bitterness, than all the sufferings which the vials of human wrath could pour upon his body.

Abraham rejoiced to see the day of the Son of man, and he saw it, and was glad. At what time was this amazing manifestation vouchsafed to the delighted eye of his faith and love? He

[1] Zech. xiii. 7.

saw it in the spirit of prophecy, gleaming through the distance of nineteen hundred years. He saw it in the surety of the promise. He saw it in the person of Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God, King of righteousness and King of peace. But he saw it especially on Mount Moriah. The day of Christ is eminently the day of his *crucifixion*, when by one offering He perfected for ever them that are sanctified; when He was wounded for our transgressions; when He was bruised for our iniquities; when the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and when with His stripes we were healed. The day of Christ was also eminently the day of his *resurrection*, when having descended into the grave He arose again as our Surety, carrying the gates and the bars of his prison with Him, as Sampson those of Gaza, where he had been shut in. With a far clearer eye, looking through his own determinate counsel and foreknowledge, did God the Father see and rejoice in the day of the Son of man. He saw it in those prophecies, which his own unerring Spirit uttered. He saw it in those promises, which his own truth proclaimed and assured. He saw it in the day of Christ's incarnation; and He saw it when the cross

slew Him, when the grave received Him; and when He came forth from his prison house to the life and glory of an endless resurrection. In all these regards, and many more, the Father saw the day of the Son of man and was glad. In all these regards, in the day of his ascension, in the day of his Spirit's effusion over the heart; in the day of his manifestation in the mightiness of life and salvation to the soul, in the day of his union to the Christian—in the day of his near and endearing fellowship, that favoured believer sees the day of the Son of man. And though now he sees Him not with a bodily eye, yet believing on Him he rejoices with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.[1] O bend the eye of your faith upon these gracious and glorious visions of redeeming love, ye to whom He who displays it is precious: and "*beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*"[2]

Having glanced at Abraham as a type of God the Father in this great transaction, its spiritual contemplation requires us to notice—

[1] By every spiritual child of Abraham, as by the father of the faithful himself, Jehovah is seen in the mount.

[2] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

II. Isaac as a most remarkable Type of God the Son.

If Abraham represented the Paternal Deity who freely bestows his Son to death for the redemption of mankind, Isaac represented the Filial Deity who voluntarily submits to death, that so He may reconcile a world of sinners to their offended Creator, Sovereign, and Judge. The precise nature of the relation which God the Son bears to God the Father lies far beyond the limits of human comprehension: but this at least is unequivocally set forth by the terms Father and Son; that they partake of a common nature; that they are persons of the same order. Hence, in this typical representation, their characters are sustained by a parent and his offspring, rather than by any other persons; that so we might learn the exact and absolute equality of Jehovah, and the Messenger of Jehovah; whatever fœderal difference there may be between them, as the sender and the sent, as the sovereign master and his righteous servant."[1] This typical resemblance then between the Son of God and the Son of Abraham, between Christ and Isaac will hold,

[1] Faber's Horæ Mosaicæ, II. 310.

(I.) *With reference to the birth of each.* Both were attended with circumstances absolutely preternatural and miraculous. Abraham's body and Sarah's womb were alike dead; and when the angel foretold this glad event, the future mother was incredulous concerning the blessing, although God's truth was pledged to bestow it. Immanuel, God with us, was born, not of the course of nature, nor of man, nor of blood. The Holy Ghost came upon the virgin, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her, when she deemed the amazing announcement impossible to be fulfilled. "How can this be?" Isaac was long promised, and was expected during five and twenty years: [1] while not less than the long and wearying tide of four thousand years rolled over a succession of generations born, sinning, mourning, dying, and gathered to their dust, between the first promise of redemption to the fallen creature in Paradise, and the advent of God in our humanity to fulfil it. Ardently as Abraham might desire the birth of his son, the ancient saints who waited for the consolation of Israel as eagerly looked for it in the Messiah; while the Father's un-

[1] Biddulph's Theology of the Patriarchs, II. 234.

bounded love expected it in the fulness of time with infinite complacency. And as Abraham made Isaac's name the memorial of his joy, so did aged faithful Simeon, speaking as the voice of the universal Church in all time, cry, "*Lord now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;*"[1] thus echoing the song of angels, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace good will towards men.*"[2]

I said that both were children of promise, and Isaac evidently with relation to Christ; for the universal blessing which was to flow from Isaac, must necessarily be referred to Him who was to spring from Isaac's loins, in whom *alone* all the families of the earth are blessed. It was Abraham's joy that Isaac was born. It was the Father's joy of love to a lost world that the Eternal Son should enter it for its redemption. It is the deep and thankful joy of all among us, who, being Christ's, are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, that "*Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father,*

[1] Luke ii. 29, 30. [2] Luke ii. 14.

the Prince of Peace."[1] Through Isaac, Abraham was the father of Israel after the flesh. Through his Incarnate Son, the Father of heaven is the parent of all his spiritual descendants. Israel had Isaac for an elder brother, and we have Christ. May the Spirit bear witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God; and if children then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ!

(II.) *The Typical Resemblance between the Son of Abraham and the Son of God also holds, with reference to the suffering and oblation of both.* Isaac was very early mocked and persecuted by his bond-brother Ishmael. The Philistines afterwards opposed him, and strove to hinder him from digging wells; until Jehovah made room for him, and overruled their enmity. The brethren of our Lord, bondmen in spirit, although nearly related to Him in the flesh reviled Him, and would not believe in Him. The nations both Jew and Gentile—they of his own house and lineage, not less than strangers, opposed Him sternly and maliciously, when He opened the wells and ordinances of his salvation amongst them. But amidst all the con-

[1] Isa. ix. 6.

tradictions of human malice—amidst all the persecutions of human unbelief and enmity, God made room for Him, so that He hath already entered upon his promised land, where He will dwell, and over which He will reign King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. I trust indeed He hath made room for Himself in some of our hearts—unsealed there the fountains of his grace, and is crying by His Spirit in language which hath an echo within us, "*Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*" [1]

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son, in the way to Mount Moriah, and he bare it thither, even to the place appointed for that sacrifice of which he then so little dreamed. Abraham himself carries the fire and the knife—emblems of divine justice: but the son carries the wood, the type of the cross, the symbol of mercy in his Atonement. Even so Jesus bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha. Where then was Moriah and where was Golgotha; the former being the place which God

[1] Rev. xxii. 17.

Himself had pointed out to Abraham by an express intimation? Moriah was a group of mountains, on one of which the Temple of Solomon, the place of sacrifice was built, and on another, if not indeed the very same, stood the cross whereupon the Lord of glory died. The enthusiasm of travellers, poets, historians, or philosophers has claimed respect, veneration, and almost idolatry, for places where those whom they regarded as among the great lights of humanity lived, died, or performed any of their great achievements. Jerusalem itself, the city of the Great King, hath been the centre of superstitious attraction. Countless pilgrims have resorted thither to worship, and millions of armed warriors have flocked in the blindest ignorance of duty to win back the Holy Sepulchre from the followers of the false prophet into the custody of Christendom, and perished in their folly, before they could tread the sacred soil which had been marked by the footsteps of the Redeemer. But no spot of the earth's surface is dearer to the believer than that whereon his Lord was crucified, and where a lost and sentenced world, lying under the wrath and curse of God, was liberated from its miserable bondage, when his anointed Son exclaimed, "*It*

is finished; and bowed his head, and gave up the Ghost." [1] The reverence for place however, is little, unless the heart can glow with grateful love for the deed; love to the Father who gave his Son; love to that Son, who freely gave Himself; love to that Almighty Spirit of grace, who seals the common salvation upon the believer, enabling him to say of this adorable Saviour, "*He loved me, and gave Himself for me.*" [2] "*Bless Jehovah, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*" [3]

When parent and child had reached the place, whereof God had told Abraham, "he built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood." Whether the child of promise were twenty-five, or (as Dr. Lightfoot imagined) thirty-three years old, he had strength enough effectually to resist, or swiftness of foot effectually to escape from the hands of Abraham. But he was a son of faith, as of promise; and therefore an obedient child, equally zealous with his father to have God's bidding accomplished, although it must be effected by his own violent death; and by an apparent impossibility of fulfilling the divine engagements on his be-

[1] John xix. 30. [2] Gal. ii. 20. [3] Psa. ciii. 2.

half. He therefore submits his hands to the bonds, his body to the altar, his breast to the knife, not only without a murmur, but doubtless with the most entire acquiescence. He gave himself fully and with good will to have God's behest and bidding concerning him performed.

Behold, a gracious and most instructive type of Him, who possessed of Almighty power, "*was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not his mouth!*"[1] When his enemies came to apprehend Him in the garden, they fell as dead men to the earth, although He merely said I am He, and the slightest effort of his Almightiness accompanied the words. When sentenced to his death of shame and agony He could have cried to his Father who would presently have sent Him more than twelve legions of angels, each one of whom, armed with power unintelligible to us, could have swept his persecutors from the land of the living, as one of them passed through the camp of the Assyrians, and slew in a single night a hundred and fourscore and five thousand. But how then could the world's salvation have been wrought? To effect

[1] Isa. liii. 7.

this great work—impracticable to any other Redeemer than God with us, He gave Himself to suffering, agony, shame, death; and said concerning them all, "*I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea thy law is within my heart.*"[1] To have salvation provided at all, for so many sinners since the world's creation, and for such a crushing weight of guilt in each, is much:—to have it at such a price, is more:—to have that tremendous price so willingly paid by the Purchaser is most of all. Who shall tell the unsearchable riches of Christ? Who shall not love Him, who thus loved us?

The Angel Jehovah stops the hand of Abraham when outstretched to slay his son: but there is no arm to interfere between divine justice and the life of Christ. He Himself, who hath power to keep it, and power to lay it down, merely saith to his executioners, "If ye seek Me, let these my disciples go their way." They escape the glittering sword of justice. He is the Ram caught in the thicket, and offered up to die, the just for the unjust, that He might bring them unto God. Isaac's figurative death was the first representation of a *human* sacrifice.

[1] Psalm xl. 8.

Hitherto only the blood of bulls, and of goats, and of lambs, had stained the altars of vicarious Atonement. In this amazing act therefore, we have an especial emblem of Him and of his work, who said, "*Sacrifice and offering, and burnt offering for sin thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared Me,*"[1]—a body like to that, in which the majesty, the justice, the holiness of God were outraged; and therefore a body, wherein the great propitiation for sin might be made, an everlasting righteousness brought in, and God enabled "*both to be just, and the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.*"[2] "*Unto Him then that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen.*"

(III.) *It remains that we notice the typical likeness between the Son of Abraham and the Son of God, in the* VIRTUAL *Resurrection of the one, and the* ACTUAL *Resurrection of the other.* I say, the *virtual* resurrection of Isaac, because although offered up only in the unreserved intention of Abraham, he was accepted, as

[1] Heb. x. 5. [2] Rom. iii. 26. [3] Rev. i. 6.

if already slain, and as such the Holy Ghost testifies. "By faith, Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called.'" Blessed be God, who when there is a willing mind, accepteth, according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not! Blessed be God, who sought only one sacrifice of human life to Himself: and provided that lamb from his own mercy; so that the sacrifices of his redeemed and sanctified people might thenceforth be only thank-offerings of holiness and grace for ever! During the whole three days between God's command, and Abraham's obedience, on the way to Mount Moriah, Isaac was dead in his father's mind; and was so accounted of God, when he was declared to be raised from the dead in a figure.[1] The ram substituted for Isaac is the type of his resurrection: even as under the Law the bird whose wings were dipped in the blood of his

[1] A figure, or parable, is a simile in which one thing is compared with another. In this place the resurrection of Isaac, and that of Christ are things likened together. In Heb. ix. 9. the word is so used when the Mosaic tabernacle with its services is called a parable—that is a visible type, emblem, or figurative representation of the blessings of Christianity.—*Biddulph. ut supra*, II. 231.

slain fellow, and himself set free, was a type of the resurrection,—the bird which died being a type of Atonement. And no other could be appointed; because as no actual rising again was ordained to these shadows of good things, the great truth of a resurrection could only, in some such manner, be exhibited to the eye of faith, in connexion with the doctrine of vicarious propitiation. The Incarnate Son of God in like manner was three days in the power of death before his glorious resurrection discharged our debt, and raised us, together with Him. That resurrection was a greater miracle than if the whole race of Adam had been brought out of the grave in a moment. For He had the curse of God and of our sins laid upon Him; and, who could roll away this heavy stone from the door of the sepulchre, except He who had power to lay down his life, and power to take it again? Christ hath drunk of the brook in the way; therefore doth He lift up his head, even to the glory of a mediatorial kingdom. Isaac's virtual and parabolic resurrection enables him to become the progenitor of the promised Seed and of the world's Saviour. The actual and most glorious resurrection of our Lord from the grave, where He rested, after

having completed the amazing work of Atonement, hath constituted Him the first fruits of a world thus ransomed from the power of the grave, and the miseries of endless death, through faith in his name. "*Because I live ye shall live also.*" "*When Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, He shall see his seed, He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.*"[1] "His people shall be made willing in the day of his power;" and more than the womb of the morning, He shall have the dew of his youth.[2] "We are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead, by the glory of the Father, we also should walk in newness of life." Are we in very deed and truth as monuments of his gracious power, members of his body, through living, acting, holy faith yielding fruit in his name, according to our baptismal privilege and duty? Then what are the happy, what the animating, what the sanctifying, what the glorious consequences of this everlasting union? "*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, Who is he that condemneth? It is*

[1] Isa. liii. 10. [2] Psalm cx. 3.

Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us." [1] Are we afflicted? It is not the sword of the vindictive Judge, but the rod of a reconciled and tender Father that is upon us. Are we in fear of death? Christ hath extracted its sting, and robbed the grave of its terrors. Do we dread the guilt of sin? The sword of justice hath smitten our surety: and the resurrection hath opened his prison doors, to shew that his suretyship hath satisfied God, and we are safe. He died for our sins, and rose again for our justification. "*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.*" [2]

Is this the day of Christ? Doth faith see it with gladness? Let us rejoice in his *Person;* for He is the glory of mankind, not less than of the Father. Let us rejoice in his *Death;* for it is our death to the condemnation of sin. Let us rejoice in his *Life;* for it is the principle, the support, the substance, of our own, which must be lived by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Let us

[1] Rom. viii. 33, 34. [2] Col. iii. 1.

rejoice in his *Love;* if we have sought Him and it by faith; for that Love is the mighty cause of all peace, all joy, all holiness, all hope, all grace, all glory, to the soul of man.

SERMON XXXV.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF SARAH.

GENESIS XXIII. 19.

And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife, in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan.

It was wisely as well as solemnly advised by the king of Israel, "*Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no device, nor wisdom nor knowledge in the grave, whither thou art hastening.*" There is a house appointed for all living—a place where all human travellers along this vale of tears, shall meet at last, whatever be the relative length of their journies. "*All the days of Methusaleh were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died.*" In whatever spirit we may expect death, whether of nature which may dread, or of faith which may welcome its

approach,—whether it come to take away our gods which we made, and leave us destitute, or to smite us on the side, like Peter's good angel, and lead us out of our prison, through the iron gate into the city of God, there is no discharge from this war; "*It is appointed unto all men once to die: but after that the judgment.*"[1] So teach us then, O thou eternal Spirit of light and truth, to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!

Such a holy lesson would the inspired record impress upon our minds, by the bereavement of Abraham in the removal of his wife, whom, old age, that slow though sure messenger, had now overtaken, to deliver the summons, which none may disobey; "*Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.*"[2] Our review of this portion of the patriarch's varied history, will include,

I. The death of Sarah.

She was the great exemplar of all holy women, of whom all well doers in the grace and Gospel of Jesus Christ, are children. The Holy Ghost declared her to be a type of that new Jerusalem, which is from above, the Church

[1] Heb. ix. 27. [2] 2 Kings xx. 1.

of Christ and Mother of us all. She hath this honour, above all women, whose names are embalmed, and whose memories are fragrant in the book of God, that her age is recorded there: she was a hundred and twenty and seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. Of her too it is first witnessed, that she was mourned and wept for. The type passed away, and well did tears and sorrow become its removal; but the antitype, the Church of God, remains, undying as Himself, who is its everlasting Life, and who hath promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Eve, the natural mother of all natural life in man,—Sarah, the spiritual mother of all gracious being —are gathered to their dust. All bodies of mankind shall sleep with the former; all bodies and souls of God's renewed family, born to Him of the Church, shall have a resting-place of hope with the latter.

The preceding chapter gave us tidings of Rebekah,—that so the friend of God might haply see in the spirit of prophecy, another hope about to arise in his family, of perpetuity to the Church; and to give continued promise of the appointed Saviour, before that brightness of Sarah's life, which had so long gilded

and gladdened his faith, was to be quenched in the night and darkness of the grave. A believer's best earthly sources of comfort may be removed; but faith and hope will be gifted with a purged and purified vision, to look for more; until every spring of trial shall be dried up, and every fountain of tears closed in the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

Sarah had been a fellow sojourner in Canaan with Abraham, above sixty years; sharing his faith, soothing his cares, upholding him in his path, and bearing his burdens. The Apostle Peter testifies of her submissive obedience to her earthly head, even as the Church is graciously and gladly subject to her glorified Husband Jesus Christ. But the separation must now be made. Long endearment, long intercourse, long communion of love, must have almost bound up Abraham's life in the life of Sarah; as ever happens to those, who, drawn together by the most endearing ties of earthly tenderness, have also a common fellowship with the Lord, as members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Deepened however, as that love was by time, and consecrated by the grace of God, its happy intercourse must be suspended. Sarah must die, and Abraham must

wait a little longer, until his own change come, and their dust may be mingled together. And surely, next to the hallowed links wherewith redeeming love binds the believer to the invisible world, there are none more dear than those cast around him, by the death of such as have been to him as his own soul. My smitten friends and brethren in Christ Jesus, pray for faith in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, that He may enable you, in full assurance of hope, to look beyond the veil, upon their estate of blessedness. "*Be followers of them, who through faith and patience have inherited the promises.*"[1] Tread in the footsteps of the flock; and although they cannot return to you, yet in a little time you shall go to them: and "*when Christ who is your life shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory.*"[2] The tongue that never addressed you, except with the tone and accents of love, is silent. The eyes that never followed you, save with anxious affection, are closed in death. The hands that laboured with delight to serve you,—the heart, upon which, next to God's supreme dominion over its affections, you were en-

[1] Heb. vi. 12. [2] Col. iii. 4.

throned, is now mingled with the dust. The form, in which you once delighted, bears now the impress of the great destroyer. It says to corruption, "*Thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister;*"[1] and dear, unspeakably dear as the departed was to you, nothing now remains, but that you bury your dead out of your sight.

It seemed not good unto the Holy Ghost, to tell the Church of God whether Sarah's death was that of calmness and peace, or the joy and triumph of an assured faith,—whether it was one of strife with the enemy of souls, or of victory over him, sensibly achieved, in the last conflict,—whether she dreaded his approach, or could say, in language like to Simeon's, when he held the world's Saviour in his arms, and felt the gladdening sense of redemption warm at his heart, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*"[2] We know not whether she was permitted to glorify the God of her mercies,—to praise Him for a conscious interest in his everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: and to say unto

[1] Job xvii. 14. [2] Luke ii. 29, 30.

the partner of her long, eventful life, "Come hither, and I will tell you what God hath done for my soul." But this we do know, and let it suffice; she *lived* in the faith, and she *died* in the faith, of Jesus Christ.

Believers, when they stand around the bed of a dying relative, often indulge a morbid anxiety for the amplest testimony to the sweetness of the promises, the faithfulness of God, and the soul's high consciousness of its Redeemer's presence, filling it with triumph. Assuredly such a witness, like that of dying Joshua to the tribes of Israel, a glad and grateful acknowledgment, like that of the Psalmist, "*My heart and my flesh fail; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever;*"[1] a joy like this unspeakable and full of glory, that makes the chamber of death fragrant with the name of Jesus, as ointment poured forth, lifts the hearts of surrounding mourners above their heaviest grief, and brings the Comforter indeed among them, with some of his dearest consolations. It enables them to join the song of high assurance, and to cry, "*O death where is thy sting; O grave, where is thy*

[1] Psalm liii. 26.

victory?"[1] But surely a grateful contentment of spirit, a deep thankfulness becomes us, if the death of a beloved believer be tranquil and serene. It should suffice us to know that as it was Christ to that disciple to live, so it is gain to die; and that the passage will be safe, though the shout and song of rapture shall not be raised, until the soul shall have passed through the dark valley of the shadow of death, and entered upon the light of separate life and bliss beyond it. Whatever be the character of the closing scene, the Redeemer will not forsake his brethren, nor God the Father, his children, nor God the Holy Ghost, the workmanship of his power, in the last conflict. And when it is passed, "*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.*"[2]

But, while the dead are placed in their state of consciousness, and in safe keeping for their ultimate destination of bliss or bale unspeakable, our chief sympathy is demanded for the living, upon whom God's bereaving providence loudly calls to lay the solemn visitation

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 55. [2] Rev. xiv. 13.

of such removal to their hearts. Here then the father of the faithful, the friend of God, will be unto us an illustrious object for imitation. I notice therefore,

II. ABRAHAM'S CONDUCT IN THIS AFFLICTION.

I know not where even in Scripture,—that rich treasure-house of gracious and exalted examples of the power of faith, a more simple, a more exquisitely beautiful instance can be found, of a conscientious discharge of the duties arising out of affliction, than this of Abraham. If we be Christ's, and therefore Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, we shall ask of God strength and grace to walk, even as he walked, in this dark hour of his providential sorrow.

(1.) *View him then as a bereaved husband.*

Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. Some have imagined that he kept his flocks and herds in Beersheba, while Sarah remained at Hebron; and that hearing how God had smitten him, he passed quickly thither. Others with more reason suppose, that he merely came from his own tent into that where his dead now lay. That Sarah had a separate tent is unquestionable. And to adduce

no other proof, Isaac brought his bride Rebekah into his mother's tent, where she became his wife, and where he was comforted in her love after his mother's death.[1] Abraham's grief was not a transient sorrow, where the eye is not affected from the heart, where the tear is forgotten as soon as shed, and the soul returns to its unhallowed rest of indifference. It was a sincere, a gracious and a godly mourning, wherein nature wept, while faith was glad. This full and firm believer in God's sure word of promise, was a man of like passions with ourselves: and it is no act of that grace of God which bringeth salvation, (and of which it is the high office to mould the Christian's mind into the divine image,) to forbid that we should mourn, when the fondest objects of our attachment are removed by death. 'The body of a dear friend must be watered with tears, when it is sown in corruption.' He hath a proud stoic's, and not a meek Christian's heart, who can see unmoved the bed where the departed lay, the table where she sat, the garden where she walked, the books, and especially the book of God wherein she read, the objects of her Christian bounty,

[1] Gen. xxiv. 67. See also xviii. 6.

the children whom she taught, and the destitute whom she relieved, the place in the sanctuary where she prayed, or the cushion whereon she knelt, when her soul rose up to God in the yearnings and wrestlings of closet supplication. We have the best and highest examples of holiness, in justification of such grief. They were devout men, who carried Stephen to his burial; yet they wept and made great lamentation. When Peter was come into the chamber of Dorcas, all the holy widows stood by him, weeping and shewing her labours of love for the poor members of the Redeemer's Church. Martha and Mary bewailed the brother whom Jesus loved. Nay, He who was at once perfect God, and perfect man, wept also at the grave of his departed friend.

But holy grief must have its measure, while it has its way. The stream must not overflow its banks, wherein God hath appointed it to run. The weeping must not be immoderate, lest it might even seem as though the wisdom that ordained, and the hand of love that struck the blow, were not forgiven by the sufferer thus refusing to be comforted, when God the Holy Ghost brought, and was ready to apply consolation and peace to the spirit in Christ Jesus.

It is a symptom of a rebellious heart, when we give that our first esteem which only ought to have our second: and it is a sin which brings its own punishment. Whatever in its own nature perishable, is suffered to take too deep root in our affections, gives proportionate pain, when God sees fit to dig it up. If our sorrow is not to be guilty, our creature love must be with measure. "*I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not as others which have no hope: for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.*" The Egyptians mourned seventy days for Jacob; but Joseph mourned publicly for his father only seven days. Why then in this instance should strangers weep more for a stranger, than a son for a father? Simply because to the Egyptians it seemed a thing incredible that God should raise the dead; and therefore a friend departed was to them for ever lost. The believing ruler of Egypt, on the contrary, looked beyond the grave for the resurrection of the dead, the life of the world to come, and an everlasting communion of love in the land of a better rest. Submissive faith has a joy wherewith a stranger

doth not intermeddle—a joy in Christ. "*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord.*"[1] And if the corpse of a dear friend hath power to draw, not only our hearts, but our feet, to the chamber where it lies, and to the grave where it mingles with the dust, how strongly should our hearts be attracted to that heavenly place, where He who died and was buried, and rose again, and ever lives and reigns, sitteth in his glory of grace, and liveth at the right hand of God. "*When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*"[2] There is his body, and there his soul, united to his glorious deity. Thither may the mourner flee, not to weep like Rachel, refusing to be comforted: for it is no place for a sorrow so unrestrained; but to rejoice in "*Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever;*[3] and more and more to long after that glorious Epiphany, when He will come again, and receive his people to Himself, that where He is, there they may be also.

The indulgent love of Mary's friends mistook her errand, when they said, she goeth unto the

[1] Job i. 21. [2] Heb. xiii. 8. [3] Ps. lxi. 2.

grave to weep there. While they supposed she went to a dead brother, she was seeking a living Saviour.[1] Even so, let the world mistake of Christian mourners. Let them esteem such to be dying, when, behold they live; sorrowful, when they are always rejoicing; poor in the things of sense, but rich and blessed in the peace of faith, the sympathy of Christ, and the presence of God.

The death of Sarah, who had so long trodden the way of salvation with Abraham, could not fail to go very near his heart. But such deaths connect heaven and earth, God and the soul, the compassionate and tender High Priest with his mourning worshipper, so intimately, that meat thus comes forth from the eater, and sweetness from the strong. A bough is thus cast into these waters of Marah, whereby their bitterness is healed, and the pilgrim is enabled to drink of them without fainting, until he is brought along his appointed way to the wells and palm trees of a spiritual and everlasting Elim.

After he had wept and mourned, in unfeigned sincerity of heart, "*Abraham stood up from*

[1] Bishop Hall's Works, II. 446.

before his dead."[1] He arose from the ground whereon he had been seated; as Job's friends sat down with him seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was very great: or as the Holy City is represented upon the medals of the Roman conquerors, sitting under her palm tree, and weeping her captivity. Other duties to the departed must take place, even of the sacredness and solitude of grief: and God is merciful to demand that so it should be; in order that necessity, if not will, may divert and perhaps diminish grief. Why seek ye always the living among the dead? And yet at the moment when Abraham stands up to make preparation for Sarah's burial, he calls her corpse *his* dead; to shew the dear communion yet existing between them, upon which the grave could make no inroad, and which could be carried onwards between one in the body, and the other quit of its tabernacle of clay in the invisible world.

But such fellowship between the embodied and disembodied spirits of Christ's true soldiers and servants is an act of holy faith. By this

[1] Gen. xxiii. 3.

grace only, the communion of saints with each other, and with their exalted Head of dignity and influence, can be maintained. I notice then,

(2.) *Abraham's conduct as a Believer in God.*

Behold a man who signally enjoyed the protection, the presence, the love, the promises of God; with whom an especial covenant had been made; whose child was the miraculous fulfilment of a promise more improbable than had ever been given to a man or woman since God commanded them to multiply upon the earth! Behold, I say, a man thus distinguished, and enriched with this world's good—a man to whom God had engaged Canaan and all the blessings which it shadowed forth to his heart—a man who was to become a great nation, and to possess this land flowing with milk and honey; who yet hath not within its boundary a strip of ground where he may bury his dead out of his sight—no, not so much as to set his foot on! By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, willing to wait Jehovah's time and mode of giving him possession; because he looked for a city which hath foundations whose Builder and Maker is God.

Very freely did the children of Heth offer

unto Abraham a burying place, at his own choice, amidst all the sepulchres of the land. They would gladly have mingled their dust, with that of a holy man, whom the Lord manifestly favoured. But he who had, through God's upholding grace, preserved himself and his household uncontaminated by the idolatries of the land, would not even mingle his bones with those of the heathen; lest even thus he might appear to sanction their awful apostacy. They whose best bond of union while living, was holy faith in the Lamb of God, and oneness of spiritual membership in Him, were to be laid side by side in a sepulchre where their bodies might sleep in Jesus. Their very dust must be separated from that of such as lived and died in rebellion against the one true God—an earnest of the eternal separation between the righteous and the wicked. In this, as in all other things, Abraham was to be a witness against surrounding iniquities. In such a spirit did Ruth the Moabitess resolve that she would live, die, and be buried with God's handmaid Naomi. In something of this mind, did the old prophet acknowledge the holiness of that seer whom yet he had so guiltily seduced. "*When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein*

the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones."[1] Even so—albeit from motives far less worthy, in those cases where in the by-gone days of our country's darkness, superstition aped religion, men whose lives had been spent in scenes of violence, hoped to escape the accusations of Satan, and the wrath of God in the great day of judgment, if they were enwrapped within the habit of a monk, and if their dust was permitted to slumber with that of the convent cemetery.

The cave of Machpelah was a distinguished family-vault of patriarchal believers. Here Abraham himself was mingled with the earth whence he was taken. Here Isaac and Rebekah slept with their forefathers in the faith of Christ. Here Jacob and Leah had their bodies laid up in the wardrobe of the grave, to await the resurrection of the just. Hither, I say, Jacob was carried by the piety of Joseph, from whom he took an oath that his bones should be brought forth from Egypt, the land of gross idolatry, and laid by the bones of those whom God, while living, had embraced within the same covenant of salvation. Hither also

[1] 1 Kings xiii. 31.

did Joseph himself command his body, embalmed and coffined in Egypt, to be carried, when Jehovah should visit his people, and bring them forth into the promised land. And upon what principle did these holy patriarchs desire that their dust should rest and be mingled together in the burial-place of Machphelah? Because they embraced the promise of God to give them Canaan—embraced it, not merely in the letter but in the spirit; embraced the sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection from the dead, and the possession of an inheritance in a glorious land, whereof the land of promise was only a feeble type. They had lived to God, a family of grace; they laid them down to die, and they gave directions where to be buried; fully knowing and being abundantly persuaded, that they should rise from the dead, a family of glory. They sought a better country, that is a heavenly: and thus they testified their faith. Upon the same principle did Jeremiah (xxxii. 6, &c.) buy the field of Anathoth from his kinsman, in full persuasion, as God's Spirit taught him, that the inheritance should be regained, and the approaching captivity pass away, after the seventy years appointed for the desolations of Jerusalem.

And they have left us an example, that we should follow their steps. There is an indissoluble union between the body and the soul, between the dust and the immortal spirit; just as there is between dear friends in love, though half the world should lie between them. For He who redeemed the soul from utter death, redeems also the body from the corruption of the grave. Moreover, as with the Eternal Son of God, during his three days slumber in Joseph's tomb, the union of his dead body to the all-glorious Deity was never dissolved, so it is with his mystical members, in their oneness with Himself. He is still not the God of the dead, but of the living, as He was of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose souls therefore lived to Him while their bodies slept and saw corruption in the grave. The dust of the saints is as precious in the sight of God—their persons as dear to the Great Head of the Church, when their comeliness is turned into the clod of the valley, as when animated in the body, and serving God by faith. In the glorious morning of the first resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ shall come to raise his redeemed and sanctified—not by the naked word of his power, as the impenitent and unbelieving shall be raised from their

graves, only to be thrust into the endless woes and terrors of the second death; but in virtue of his entire membership with them. Because He arose they shall arise; because He liveth, they shall live also; because He reigns, they shall reign also in glory everlasting. We must cry, concerning those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, as we see the finger of decay doing its appointed work upon them, "Bury my dead out of my sight." But when no longer lovely in our view—nay when we can bear to look upon them no longer, they are as dear and as lovely as ever in the sight of Jesus, because He hath redeemed both body and soul to Himself and to God by his blood. He must see in both of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. Ye whose hearts are anchored upon the promises, whose hopes are castled in the covenant of his inviolable truth and love, be persuaded, (and may the persuasion link you more closely still to Him) that neither death nor life shall be able to separate you from that love of God which is in Him. "*If the Spirit of Him that raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead dwell in you, He that raised Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by*

his Spirit that dwelleth in you."[1] The body which falls into the grave shall arise from its darkness; and its scattered atoms shall be collected from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south. There shall be an entire identity between the believer who died, and the believer whom God shall bring with Him, however refined and glorified. That which was sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption; that which was sown in weakness shall be raised in power; that which was sown in dishonour shall be raised in glory; that which was sown a natural body shall be raised a spiritual body; and yet substantially the same. With those very members, wherewith you shall have served God, amidst all the gracious strifes and conflicts, toils and watchings, prayers and praises, hopes and fears, strivings after holiness, and mournings for sin, pantings after increasing love, yet oppressive sense of coldness or lukewarmness towards Him who bought you with Himself, and by whom you lived—with those very members shall you serve and magnify the God of your salvation, in the sinless enjoyments of a glorious rest. And they whom you have

[1] Rom. viii. 11.

left for a while, to dwell in the dust,—they whom you have loved and lost having fought the good fight, finished their course, kept the faith, shall be your companions in that royalty, which the Lamb will dispense, and your fellow priests in that high temple, whereof He will be the light and glory. "*He will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.*" "*I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*"[1] O Christians, wheresoever your cave of Machphelah may be, yet when your earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, you shall have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. "*All things are yours, whether of the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*"[2] "*Wherefore comfort ye one another with these words.*"

Stand up from before your dead, ye who in

[1] Job xix. 26. [2] 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

the Gospel mourn for them who have departed hence in the true faith and fear of God's holy name. The place where you have committed their bodies to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, is well called *a cemetery*—that is a sleeping place, where they rest in the Lord; and whence they shall be awakened, to enter into the joy of their Lord. The grave hath lost its terrors, because Christ hath died. He hath laid his own blessed body of our humanity there; and so hath changed it from a place of dreadful darkness, to a perfumed chamber of repose. There leave them in faith until its door is about to be opened to admit yourselves; and then expect the Prince of Peace to say, when He gives your own summons to enter the house of your body's rest. "*Fear not to go down into Egypt, I will go with thee.*"[1] The days of separation will then be passed away; and the walk of love, the race of holiness, the yearning after gracious conformity with God, will have its termination in the full accomplishment of every promise.

[1] Gen. xlvii. 3.

Abraham never purchased, nor was he ever permitted to have a foot of land in Canaan beyond this burial place; and yet his posterity according to God's command were to enter, to occupy, to enjoy it. He calls himself a stranger and a sojourner. And the people of God ever so thought themselves, in that very land. Did Abraham then doubt the eventual possession of Canaan? Exactly the reverse. Here, as elsewhere, he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. When he laid the bones of Sarah there, when his own were afterwards deposited by her side, in the same cave of Hebron, he took as it were possession of the country of God's promise, in God's name, and in dependance upon God's truth. In due time the divine engagement was fulfilled, and Israel portioned out the land. Such a spirit of patient faith is required of them who would take possession of the dark regions of paganism in the name of Christ, and there establish a flock, and fold, and Church of the living God. Thus, I doubt not it hath been, and yet must be, in the proceedings of missionary enterprize. What multitudes of ministers have gone forth from our Church, not counting their lives dear

unto themselves, that they might preach the everlasting gospel of the grace of God, the unsearchable riches of Christ! What numerous devoted heralds of salvation, overruled by his command in favour of perishing men, constrained by his amazing love to their own souls, and animated by the unfailing faithfulness of his promise, have left all that is commonly held dear of life, taken the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, in one hand, and the shield of faith in the other, and shod their feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; and, sacrificing every thing to the one great object of extending the triumphs of Redeeming Love, have, after a struggle more or less protracted with the pressure of disease, and the powers of darkness, laid their bodies to rest in unknown graves, and in lands of idolatry! Was their work then, and labour of love in vain in the Lord? Had Schwartz, and Gericke, and Martyn, and Brown, and Thomason, and Corrie, no high and gracious persuasions, that they were taking possession of the countries where they proclaimed Christ, and died in his peace? Had those names, less known to us, but not less dear to Jesus, who with such amazingly lavish prodigality of self-devotedness counted not their

lives dear unto themselves, that they might cry in the ears of the benighted heathen of Western Africa, "*Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world*,"[1]—had they, I ask, no blessed anticipations, that by thus taking possession of their early and obscure sepulchres in that dreadful cemetery of European life, they had not also gained seizin of these lands for Christ, as Abraham claimed Canaan for God's heritage, by laying Sarah's bones, and his own dust in the cave of Mamre? I doubt not that so it hath been; and that time will shew, that in this respect they neither run in vain, nor laboured in vain, nor died in vain. On their tombs will other men like minded stand; from their resting places will other lips proclaim the glad tidings of a Saviour's love; until the Lord, from amidst these realms of present darkness, adds daily to his Church such as shall be saved. Hasten it, O God, in thy time, and let all who love and believe in Jesus say, Amen.

[1] John i. 29.

SERMON XXXVI.

ABRAHAM'S PURCHASE OF A BURYING PLACE FROM THE SONS OF HETH.

GENESIS XXIII. 20.

AND THE FIELD, AND THE CAVE THAT IS THEREIN, WERE MADE SURE UNTO ABRAHAM FOR A POSSESSION OF A BURYING PLACE BY THE SONS OF HETH.

THE ingenuity of men in the department of analytical science, has enabled them to discover certain general formularies and expressions, which can be so applied, as to solve and explain all the particular cases that come within their limits; and thus many difficulties are avoided, that could not otherwise have been overcome, at least without excessive expense of time and labour. The infinite wisdom of God has done the same for the immeasurably higher concerns of man, in his moral and spiritual state and relations. Instead of giving a particular rule for every imaginable variety of human duty

and human circumstances, which, although the unfathomable depths of the divine mind could easily have furnished, the poor and weak creature could never have remembered, in his time of need and temptation, the Most High has laid down some broad and beaming principle, in the revelation of his grace, applicable to every condition wherein men can be placed, and directing them in every duty they have to perform. Had no other beacon been lighted up for guiding us aright in our course of mutual obligations, than that incontestibly divine direction of the Son of God, "*Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.*"[1] it would have amply sufficed for its purpose; because it would have served at once, to point out the unreasonableness of selfish expectation, and the duty which a sense of our own wishes or necessities required us to pay towards the wishes and necessities of others. Still however, the most precious, the most powerful, and indeed the most simple of all these leading principles, wherewith the word of God hath provided us, are those which most immediately connect us with Himself. Such are the faith

[1] Matt. vii. 12.

that realizes and rests upon his word, the love that works through faith, a sense and experience of redeeming mercy, brought home upon our hearts, which presents the Saviour to them, as the great and only worthy object of all their affections. These sink the world, and all that it can offer beneath our feet, when it attempts to compete with Him for empire over us; and so constrain us by the love of Jesus, that "*whatsoever we do, whether in word or deed, we should do all to the glory of God.*"[1]

Under this high and heavenly principle of faith did Abraham act, and found it applicable to all the positions of his varied and eventful life. We have seen how it sustained and comforted him, under his great bereavement by the death of Sarah. We have considered its power over him, with reference to that event, as a *Husband,* and a *Believer,* called to mourn over the removal of one who was most dear, and yet to look through his tears upon the glories of that resurrection of the body, and that life everlasting, wherein the ransomed, sanctified, glorified heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, shall "*reckon that the sufferings of this present*

[1] 1 Cor. x. 31.

time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them."[1]

We are now to behold the same hallowed principle of faith, and its consequent heavenly mindedness, guiding the patriarch *in an ordinary civil transaction*, in one of those every-day duties, the sum of which composes the business and substance of relative life and its obligations. I allude to the purchase of a sepulchre, wherein the body of Sarah might be laid to await the resurrection of the just, when the flesh that hath rested in hope shall be re-united to the soul, and both shall be for ever with the Lord. Allow me then to exhibit,

I. THE GENERAL DEALING OF ABRAHAM WITH THE HITTITES.

God who often draws to Himself some of his largest revenues of praise and glory from the deepest trials and afflictions of his children, overruled Abraham's cause of sorrow in his heavy loss, not only to the gratification of a most lawful and amiable desire, but also to the honour of his own name, in the patriarch's holy consistency of conduct. And thus, be it remembered, for every believer's consolation, He will

[1] Rom. viii. 18.

act towards those who feel that whatsoever they do, they should do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men.

No doubt one who nearly sixty years before had armed three hundred and ten trained servants, born in his own house, and led them forth to war, had not been unvisited by death. Yet he was hitherto unprovided with a sepulchre, simply because none of the fruit of his body, heirs together with him of Canaan, of a Redeemer, and of an everlasting salvation, had died. But now that the partner of his faith, the fellow heir of his promise, the blessed type of Christ's redeemed and believing Church, is removed, her bones must, if possible, rest in that land where the world's Redeemer was to be born and die. Sarah is the first fruits of his family, redeemed from among men to God and to the Lamb, on whom death hath set the seal of an accomplished salvation. Her burial therefore, is not only an act of pious solicitude, but of holy faith. Both are in full and gracious exercise, while Abraham is engaged in endeavours to complete a common bargain, of sale and purchase. Observe then,

(1.) *His moderation and lowliness of demeanour.* God hath sworn with an oath to give

him this land,—hath distinguished him beyond any individual, his family beyond any tribe within its borders; and if God were true, nothing could be more certain than his possession of Canaan in full sovereignty, either in his own person, or in that of his posterity. The divine engagement might well have been interpreted in the former sense: and he might therefore have been thought justifiable in claiming as a right, not only what would suffice for a burial place; but enough to form a splendid settlement for himself and his numerous household. A literal interpretation of spiritual promises, made his descendants in after ages confound gracious blessings with carnal views of universal dominion; plunging them into rebellion against their conquerors, and deluging the land with blood. The history of our own country, abounding in the fiercest civil agitations, can testify of a sect of martial enthusiasts, who having assisted to murder the lawful monarch, proclaimed the universal reign of Jesus Christ, together with their own right as the saints of God to the possession of empire under Him. They spurned therefore at all human control, except the iron despotism which themselves would have exercised, and beneath which they would have con-

tinued to oppress and exhaust the groaning land. But Abraham, better taught of God, and therefore willing to abide the time appointed in the counsels of eternal wisdom, received the promises, having seen them afar off and embraced them. He stays God's leisure for the possession, four hundred years before he takes livery and seizin; purchasing with money that which the great Owner of heaven gave him freely.

He therefore rose up before the sons of Heth, confessing that he was a stranger and a pilgrim in Canaan. He is aware of no right to make an inroad upon any man's property: of no authority from on high to usurp a civil possession and control. He therefore very meekly intreats from the elders of the land, and the legitimate fountains of power, that they will give, or rather sell him a place where he may bury his dead. He bows down before them, and does them reverence, well knowing that no grace could better become a friend of God, and an heir of blessedness, than lowly courtesy to the powers that be, and a submission to their award, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake, if that award violated no command, nor outraged the glory of God.

Abraham's courtesy to the Hittites, who sat

for judgment in the gate, was strictly a believer's grace, and sprung from a heart wherein the love of God reigned, in the fulness of spiritual power. This present evil world, like the ground which the Lord hath cursed, may yield something as like to gracious courtesy, as eastern tares to real wheat. But the state of heart which produces the true plant grows not in the soil of nature. It is a fruit of the Spirit, and is found only in the garden of God. It springs from charity, and therefore derives its being from the life of God within the soul, the principle of all grace and goodness. It is no mere form, the phantom of a feeling which has no existence,—the mere outward garb and semblance of respect and amiableness,—but the product of love unfeigned, and without dissimulation. It is a disinterested state of inward mind, and a corresponding exhibition of outward act. Like Abraham's, it seeketh not its own, but studies the feelings of others; and so far as may be lawful, makes itself all things to all men, if that by any means it may win some, hoping for nothing again. It hath within it no elements of humour and caprice, nothing of the lightning flash that burst upon men unexpectedly, and then leaves the sky dark and

lurid as before. It is a settled grace, which descending into the heart from Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, partakes in some measure of his unchangeableness. The consistent believer is clothed with humility, because he is conformed to the image of God's dear Son. He therefore esteems others better than himself. Without servility, (which is always linked to pride, although the common slave of both wishes to conceal the chain that fastens them together, even from his own eye,) without abject flattery, and without the least sinful compliance, he imitates the condescension of the Eternal Word, who came from his glorious rest above, to seek and to save that which was lost; entreating when He might command; yet never failing to rebuke, when it was needful for his own most gracious purpose in the salvation of men. Such true courtesy is an essential portion of that charity which never faileth; and the omission of the one involves a violation of the other. That Christian therefore, who would adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things,—who would exhibit, as every disciple, zealous for his master's glory ought, the mind that was in Christ, must bow down in meekness, in lowliness, and in love,

to have his commerce with a world that lies in the wicked one. Yet he may be conscious at the same time of privileges, blessings, possessions, hopes, reversions, immeasurably more glorious than all that wealth can give, or than all that carnal and worldly men can either desire, or devise for good. And mark

(2.) *The value of holy consistency.* A believer in God, can afford, if I may so speak, to condescend to men of the lowest estate, and bear himself meekly towards the highest. The Hittites were an idolatrous race, the descendants, not of Shem, but of Canaan, to whom no divine, no gracious promises had been made. They were living without God in the world. Yet Abraham had commanded their respect, not merely by his victories, his flocks and herds, and numerous household; but by his holy walk, by manifest tokens of some divine hand accompanying him, by his blameless carriage, his holy zeal, the general consistency between his profession and his practice. This gracious agreement, is palpable even to the eye of sense. A vision utterly dark to spiritual objects can easily discern it; for they who feel not the power of holiness in themselves, can discover the beauty of holiness in others; and

are often compelled to do it homage, at the very moment when the enemy of God and man within their hearts would gladly force them to scorn and persecute it. "Hear us, my Lord," said the children of Heth to Abraham's demand for a burying place; "Thou art a mighty prince;" or as the margin reads it, a prince to God among us. "In the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead: none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, that thou mayest bury thy dead." They discerned a blessing upon him; and they were willing, they were anxious, each man for himself, and all for the community, that he would lay the bones of his faithful and honoured dead among them. The offer of a sepulchre was a tribute of great respect; for men in those days were jealous of their graves, and deemed it in ordinary cases a pollution that other dust should mingle with their own. Yet the Hittites wished that Abraham's family and Abraham's self should live, and die, and be buried amongst them. His request therefore, so meekly and respectfully urged, was generously and respectfully granted. His merit was acknowledged, and though they knew it not, they thus paid a tribute to Jehovah's praise, and thus glorified God in him.

No command is more frequently or more powerfully urged upon his brethren by the Lord Jesus Christ, than watchfulness. And, after that vigilance which guards his own soul, under the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, against offending God in thought, word, or deed, I know nothing wherein a gracious caution is more needful, to him who walks, as every child of God does walk, in an unbelieving world, than in his duty to maintain a course of holy wisdom towards those who are without. He must be careful that the sacred cause of Christ, and of salvation by Him,—the cause of God's honour, and the influence of his blessed faith, suffer not in the estimation, nor be thrust away from the souls of men by the inconsistency of one who owns his name, and professes to glory only in the Redeemer's cross. There should be an unslumbering anxiety within a Christian's heart upon this great point. Men should be compelled, (and his own conduct is the only compelling force,) to take knowledge of him that he hath been with Jesus. If he be a light shining in a dark place, the darkness may not comprehend it at first, but may at length be led to admire its brightness, to follow it, and to partake it. The believer's life is hid with

Christ in God. Men can taste the sweetness of the stream, as his daily walk and conversation bring it to their lips, although they are as yet utter strangers to the depths of grace in the fountain whence it issues. In good time their day of visitation may come, and themselves drink at the well head of life and salvation in the faith of Jesus. Men may long mock and scorn the Christian's walk of holiness, as the path of a wandering and eccentric orb, crossing and confounding the ordinary and more sensible paths of life. But a blessing may attend holy consistency: a blessing in cases beyond number has attended it: and men, delighted at once by its beauty, and yearning after its happiness, may at last resolve in the help of God to be of the same happy fellowship, and say, "*We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.*[1]

Having thus noticed Abraham's general conduct towards the Hittites; time requires that we consider,

II. The patriarch's particular dealing with Ephron.

We are presented in this instance with the

[1] Zech. viii. 23.

earliest record of a sale and conveyance of land: and its simplicity is exceedingly beautiful. A more refined state of society has unquestionably its advantages, very many, and very great. But as in mechanical principles and their improved application to the purposes of motion, something is lost in one direction, while there is gain in another; so is it in the more artificial and more advanced stages of the social compact. Godly simplicity and sincerity are more endangered. Hence springs the multiplication of forms and documents. Hence the sad and awful increase of oaths and adjurations which have been introduced into every department of business, to such a tremendous demoralization of the hearts and consciences of mankind. It has thus at length happened, that an oath, the most awful form in which man can connect his truth or falsehood with the solemnities of eternal judgment, instead of being for confirmation an end of all strife, has become in too many instances of the world's intercourse, and not least in its commercial relations almost the mockery of a name. To return however to the immediate subject before us, I observe,

(1.) *The disinterested kindness of Ephron.*

Abraham had fixed upon the cave of Mach-

pelah, if it might be obtained, as a suitable place of burial for his wife. He therefore respectfully communed with the sons of Heth, that they would be his mediators with its owner, Ephron, to give it him for as much money as it was worth; that so he might have possession of a sepulchre in Canaan. Ephron, in the spirit of a bounteous liberality, partaking also of the common respect and admiration which Abraham had gathered around him, and the golden opinions which he had won from all, though the patriarch seems not to have personally known him, answered in the audience of all the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying, "Nay, my Lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee; bury thy dead."

As the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light, so does it not unfrequently happen, as I fear, that they exhibit a promptitude of kindness, a generosity of action, and a liberality of procedure, in the common intercourse between man and man, which may well call for self-examination, and bring a blush of shame upon the cheek

of Christian professors, as the result of that examination. Place the conduct of Ephron the idolatrous Hittite, in his bountiful offer of the field and cave of Machpelah, side by side with the selfish, forecasting, and huckstering policy of Lot, a worshipper of the true God, when he chose the plain of Sodom, well watered, and fruitful as the garden of the Lord, where he might feed his flocks, and multiply his pastoral wealth. How kind and honourable the bounty of the one; how mean and cold the calculating avarice of the other! Ephron offers to Abraham, (a stranger to his race, whose faith in God condemned his unbelief,) the sepulchre which he needs, and that with the open hand of an unsparing liberality. Lot, reckless of his kinsman's interest, eagerly grasps the better portion for himself. "*What do ye more than others?*" is a question which in matters of bounty and benevolence, as in all virtues that ought to spring from a root of salvation within the soul, Christians should frequently put to themselves. Their love of Christ should constrain them here, as in every other walk of holy duty. And having freely received from the unsearch-

[1] Matt. v. 47.

able riches of God in his Son, they should be ready freely to give, where haply they might have an opportunity of selling, and getting gain. Charity seeketh not her own: and he who hath the law of redeeming love written upon fleshly tables of his heart, by the finger of the Holy Ghost, and thus possesses the mind of Christ, will remember that divine declaration which apostolic tradition recorded in the Scriptures, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*"[1] An ostentatious display of liberality is indeed not less entirely foreign to the precepts and spirit of evangelical charity and beneficence, than an undue tenacity and withholding what is meet. But there is a golden mean, intelligible to worldly men, recommending the religion of a Christian professor, and forming one of the essential ingredients of that holy consistency of Christian character, which is as winning and graceful to men of the world, as the harmonious proportions of an exquisite temple, or the beauties of a diversified landscape, wherein all the elements of loveliness and grandeur are blended perfectly together, is to the delighted beholder. Arise then, and shine

[1] Acts xx. 35.

in this grace of holy disinterestedness, as in every other that reflects the Sun of righteousness; if indeed your light be come, and if the glory of the Lord be risen upon you.

The servant of God must not be excelled by the servant of the world. "*Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, we must think on these things.*"[1] Such at least was Abraham's rule of conduct, as we learn from

(2.) *His disinterested refusal of Ephron's offer.*

There are times wherein we may best shew our sense of a kindness pressed cheerfully upon us, by frankly accepting it. There are other cases, and other seasons, where our own circumstances, and the honour of God seem to demand us to decline the liberality, under a sense of the obligation as deep and grateful, as though we had actually incurred it. In a former opportunity Abraham would not receive the goods recovered in war at the hand of the king of

[1] Phil. iv. 8.

Sodom, lest he should say, "I have made Abraham rich." In like mindedness he would not now avail himself of Ephron's kindness; that so he might take away all occasion from the Hittites and from Ephron himself, of saying that he owed the first place upon which he could set his foot in Canaan to the courtesy of man, rather than to his own purchase, in reliance upon the sure promise of God. Ephron had given to Abraham, as in after days Araunah gave unto David, as a king unto a king. But while a noble spirit of bounty actuated Ephron and Araunah, a spirit of holy affection actuated Abraham and the son of Jesse. The latter would not sacrifice unto the Lord his God, of that which did cost him nought; the former would not bury his beloved wife in a grave provided by the generosity of another, when he was well able to give her a suitable resting place. We have a still more illustrious example of this disinterestedness—a display of it into which angels desire to look. The Eternal Son of the Father, was to possess a royalty and kingdom over the bodies and souls of men. He took it not, however, for nothing: He purchased it by his incarnation, his suffering, his agony, his death upon the cross: "*and he that*

saith, he abideth in Him, ought himself so to walk, even as He walked."[1] But we proceed to shew from this transaction

(3.) *The true spirit of bargain and traffic.*

Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land, and he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, "But, if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field, take it of me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him, My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver;[2] what is that between me and thee, bury thy dead. And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant. And the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence

[1] 1 John ii. 6.

[2] That is, according to some computations, 50*l.* according to others, 60*l.* of our money.

of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city."

The offer then, is fairly made by Ephron, in the consciousness of the land's value, and as simply accepted by Abraham, well contented to make the purchase, at a price which he deemed it reasonable to pay, when duty had caused him to refuse it as a free gift. Nothing can be more simple, nothing more beautiful than this whole account of sale and purchase. It stands on record as an example for every similar transaction—an example the more striking, because comparatively, I fear, so rarely followed. It stands, among other instances, like the moon in her radiance amidst the dimmer fires of heaven. And why should it be thus: Why should the history of daily traffic be conversant with cases of an opposite character? "*It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.*"[1] Solomon's charge of such unfair dealing would cease to apply, did men always traffic with each other in the full sincerity of their hearts. If instead of overrating what he had to dispose of, the seller would give it that worth, which his con-

[1] Prov. xx. 14.

science tells him is the truth; and if instead of underrating what he verily believes the true worth of the merchandize he desires, the buyer would simply admit it, how much unfairness, how much unkindness, how much suspicion, how many blots upon the fair face of Christian traffic would be removed at once! If the divine rule already quoted were brought to bring its mighty power upon all the interchanges of trade,—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them," it would purify the whole horizon of commercial bargain, from the mightiest to the meanest object of its embrace. If the traffickers of the earth—(and every man who hath a want for himself, or for others, is among the number)—would deal in simplicity of soul; if each would especially remember that God's honour is in his hands; if each would go to the office, the mart, or the shop, whether as buyer or seller, according to the mind of God; if each would undertake his duty in the spirit of fervent prayer, desirous of acting out the grace it asks of God, commercial reciprocities would soon assume a brighter aspect.

I own, and gladly own that in the vastness of commercial enterprize throughout a land

whose merchants are princes, and her traffickers the honourable of the earth—and no where more commonly than among yourselves, there is a rectitude, and a faith, and a confidence in the inter-communion of trade, greatly and beautifully simplifying its procedures, and giving (it may be on selfish, and it may be on higher and nobler principles) an ease and a safety of intercourse, which otherwise would be impossible. And I believe that the instances of violated engagements, when merely verbally undertaken, and that in the most summary manner, are of comparatively rare occurrence. But this admission leaves the main and wasting ulcer upon the body of ordinary dealing unhealed, and indeed untouched. So long as it is the common, and undeniable practice of one party to ask more than he means to take, accompanied with assurances that he cannot reduce his demand; and of the other to offer less than he is willing in the secret consciousness of his heart to give, so long is there a want of truthfulness, simplicity, and that transparent integrity, which every one desirous of maintaining a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man, should aim to exhibit. So long indeed, is there a want of mutual honesty in

the compact. The seller soon fixes his eye upon such buyers, and demands accordingly. The purchaser, so minded, suspects the advance which his own conduct has often fixed upon the article: and what is the consequence? Guilt is thus fastened upon the soul; the conscience is defiled, and made more insensible; and God is systematically dishonoured, in the violation, or the evasion of his command, to say nothing of the spirit, of his Gospel.

'We greatly mistake,' as one hath eloquently and truly said, 'the transforming influence of the gospel, if we do not think that *uprightness* of character emerges at the same time with *godliness* of character; or that the virtues of mercantile intercourse do not form upon the believer into as rich and varied an assemblage, as do the virtues of the sanctuary: or that while he puts on those graces, which are singly acceptable to God, he falls behind in any of those graces which are both acceptable to God, and approved of men. Every professing Christian should vindicate this assertion by his own personal history in the world. He must not put aside his godliness when he has done with the morning devotion of his family; but carry it abroad with him, and make it his companion

and his guide, and his familiar friend through the whole business of the day; always saying in his heart, "*Thou God seest me;*"[1] and remembering that there is not one hour that can flow, nor one occasion that can happen, where his law is not present, and where it must not preside. It is false that the principle of Christian sanctification possesses no influence over the transactions of civil and ordinary life. It is altogether false that godliness is a virtue of an order so lofty and monastic, as to hold its dominion only over the solemnities of worship, or over the solitudes of prayer and spiritual contemplation. If it be substantially a grace at all, it will give a direction and influence to the whole of our path in society; nor is it vested with the place which of right it claims, until it be invested with a presiding authority over the entire system of human affairs. And therefore, the preacher is only sending the lovely and life-giving religion of the gospel abroad over the field of its legitimate operation, when he goes with it to your counting houses, and there rebukes every selfish inclination that would carry you ever so little within the limits of fraudu-

[1] Gen. xvi. 13.

lency; when he repairs to the crowded exchange, and pronounces of every bargain over which truth in all its strictness has not presided, that it is tainted and defiled by sin against God; when he looks into the shop, and in listening to the contest of argument between him who magnifies the object of sale and purchase, and him who would diminish its worth, he calls it the contest of avarice broken loose from integrity.'[1]

Of all such doings and dealings—of the defilement of such a spirit, utterly repugant to the glassy simplicity of an evangelical conversation, I would have you ignorant;—or when it comes under your notice, I would have you cry, 'So will not I, because of the fear of God.' It is not because it is creditable before all thinking men to eschew the meanness of these prevailing evils; nor is it merely—however deeply worthy of consideration to every disciple of Christ, that a reproach will thus be brought upon all who profess his holy faith, that the unthinking and prejudiced world exaggerates the few into the many, inverting the process of Atonement, by laying the sins of one

[1] Chalmers' application of Christianity to the commercial and ordinary affairs of life, pp. 61, 62.

man upon the multitude of believers. But it is because of the entire inconsistency of such a fraudulent spirit with Gospel precept, no less than with Gospel promise. It is because a stumbling-block is thus laid in the way of weak Christians, and because the Holy Spirit of God is thus resisted and grieved. The very essence of Christianity is heavenly-mindedness; and every approach towards double dealing, whether in traffic, or in any other transaction, is a canker at its root, hindering its growth, and tending to make it pine and perish.

SERMON XXXVII.

ABRAHAM'S PROVISION OF A WIFE FOR ISAAC.

GENESIS XXIV. 2—4.

AND ABRAHAM SAID UNTO HIS ELDEST SERVANT OF HIS HOUSE, THAT RULED OVER ALL THAT HE HAD, PUT, I PRAY THEE, THY HAND UNDER MY THIGH: AND I WILL MAKE THEE SWEAR BY THE LORD, THE GOD OF HEAVEN, AND THE GOD OF THE EARTH, THAT THOU SHALT NOT TAKE A WIFE UNTO MY SON OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE CANAANITES AMONG WHOM I DWELL: BUT THOU SHALT GO INTO MY COUNTRY, AND TO MY KINDRED, AND TAKE A WIFE UNTO MY SON ISAAC.

THE aged believer, as he draws near to the end of his course, looks back upon the past with holy gratitude, and upon the future with a hope full of immortality. Thus happily and graciously minded, he awaits the period of his dismissal, with no abatement of zeal for the divine honour, nor of heavenly love towards those in whom his best earthly affections have been centred. Having himself lived the life of

faith in the Son of God, he exceedingly desires that the same extent of spiritual privilege which he hath largely enjoyed, should be communicated in yet larger measure to those, by whom his place in the Church shall be occupied, when he is sleeping in the grave.

Abraham was now old, and well stricken in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. Among the other sources of his happiness, and indeed of his spiritual mercies, his marriage with Sarah was to be especially accounted. It had brought peace into his tent, and had encouraged him in his holy walk of faith. Profiting then by the well-remembered lesson of his own experience in this matter of deep and vital interest, he had an important duty to perform, and suitable steps to take towards Isaac, his son of God's amazing promise, like himself the heir of the world by faith, linked with him to the same unchangeable God, by the same covenant of grace, and in whose seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. That duty and those measures will open matter for prayerful consideration. We notice then,

ABRAHAM'S ANXIETY FOR THE RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE OF HIS SON. The subject may fitly

be divided into two parts, and viewed accordingly.

I. *Some general remarks upon this holy ordinance of God.*

Already had the sure testimony of Jehovah been given in the patriarch's behalf, (and one of more solemn appeal to every head of a family, could not have been recorded,) "*I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that thing which He hath spoken.*" [1] God will not hide the secrets of his love from that man who will not conceal the ways of salvation from such as are placed under his discipline, authority, and instruction. He shall be magnified of Jehovah, who would exalt Jehovah in his household. Nothing that an ever-watchful care, a zealous and affectionate course of teaching, an unceasingly pleading spirit of prayer, owned, honoured, and blessed from above, could effect to lead Isaac into the path of spiritual peace and life eternal had been withheld. And the end was happy, in proportion as the object and the means were holy.

[1] Gen. xviii. 19.

But the son of Abraham's affections and hopes were now forty years old. It was therefore full time that he should enter upon the practice of those duties which parental instruction had enforced, and parental example recommended. He had bound Abraham's heart to him, by piety and well-accomplished duty as a son. He was now to shew how well a child's holy submission to parental discipline, when its great object is that child's happiness and guidance into the way of salvation, prepares him to undertake and discharge, in his turn, the solemn responsibilities of the husband and the father. Whether these high responsibilities regarded the relation wherein Isaac would stand to his family, to the community, or to the Church, they were emphatically momentous; to say nothing of their aspect and bearing upon his own spiritual state, and hopes towards God. Isaac had to Abraham, not only a filial, but a spiritual relation. It was therefore especially beseeming the father of the faithful to beware, lest any unhallowed desires of wealth or grandeur should influence his choice of a wife for his son, rather than those less obtrusive, but immeasurably higher and more precious endowments, wherewith they are gifted, whom the

Holy Spirit hath transformed into the divine likeness, and whom that Almighty Sanctifier has overruled to seek and secure the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Unquestionally such worldly advantages as may lawfully occur, are not lightly to be overlooked: for they may enable the Christian to glorify God by the employment of more talents in his service, as well as by the thankful enjoyment of more comforts than would otherwise have fallen to his share in the appointments of infinite wisdom. But they who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, will be much on their watchtower of prayer and caution, that such advantages or the desire of them, do not ensnare their minds, and usurp the place of the one thing needful. A simple devotedness to God, under the constraining love of Christ, should be unceasingly and supremely kept in view, by every believer in an estimate of what is essential to be found in the partner of his hopes and joys, his trials and comforts, his desires and efforts to glorify God in his body and in his spirit which are God's.

This sacred union, hallowed especially by its mystical representation of the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church,

which He cleansed with his blood, on which He bestowed his Holy Spirit for a dowry, and eternal glory with Himself for a jointure,—that sacred union which was ordained of God in paradise, which, once formed, the man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, embraces within its folds of tenderness the dearest and most important relations, and looks with an aspect of especial regard upon the eternal state of both parties. It should therefore be a subject of parental consideration, associated with many a fervent and wrestling prayer of faith, hope, and eager desire, that in the solemn change of state which brings a child within the sphere of such relations, all other considerations may be as dust in the balance, compared with the life of God in the soul of the desired husband or wife. Alas, how frequently do even Christian parents wrong their holy profession, expose their children to snares of tremendous temptation, and throw a stumbling-block in the way of others, by an idolatry of mammon in their settlement! How often, instead of earnestly pleading with God in this, as in every other respect, "O that Ishmael might live before thee," do they exhibit an

eagerness and anxiety after marriages of wealth or splendour; thus exhibiting too plainly that the world which they profess to have forsaken, has still a fearful hold upon them; and that where much of their treasure is, there is much of their hearts also.

There can be no doubt that Isaac, in whose behalf Abraham's wise and holy design was formed, had full intimation of his father's purpose, was of his council in the whole procedure, as it passed through his mind, and fully consenting to the pious conclusions, at which he had arrived. Between such a father and such a son, there must have been an entire oneness of thought, a harmony of mind, a mutual and unrestricted confidence in all things, and assuredly not least in a matter so weighty as that of Isaac's marriage. And so it should ever be. On the one side, sons or daughters justly offend, if without cause or wilfully, they refuse a parent's choice. They should endeavour to school their hearts into obedience unto those, to whom they owe themselves. On the other hand, a parent shall not be guiltless, if, holding too stern a hand of controul over the fruit of his body, he shall resolve violently to force the child's affections to his own will,—

and that will it may be, the offspring of a sordid love of gain; and where he finds the repugnance invincible, or the affections previously settled, will rather break than bow them; less careful to persuade, than to compel. The contract between Isaac and Rebekah is a beautiful instance to confirm this remark. That union was proposed and considered between Abraham's proxy and the maid's father Bethuel, with her brother Laban. The circumstances were of such hope and promise, built upon the best of all foundations, a desire for the happiness of the parties, and the glory of God, as to secure their full consent. But when all this is done, nothing is done until Rebekah also has given her entire adherence to the plan. They say to Abraham's proxy, "We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go."[1] Until that needful question had been put, until that decided answer had been given, all the engagements of Bethuel and Laban were complimentary or conditional; all the jewels given to the bride, and all the precious things bestowed upon her mother and brother, were but

[1] Gen. xxiv. 57, 58.

at the mercy of the receivers. As to Isaac,—I have already said that his full acquiescence and consent must have been the turning point of this whole gracious and happily-terminated negotiation. It is altogether impossible to imagine, that while the father of the faithful committed such ample powers for conducting it to a servant, he should not have taken sweet counsel with his own son upon a matter so intimately interwoven with that son's happiness, and with the prosperity of the Church of God.

Otherwise than this it ought never to be in Christian marriage. The free and cheerful consent of parents and parties, makes the union both full and happy. Let not the child willingly contradict the wishes of his parents: let not the parent make his own will the tyrant's bed, to which his child must be fitted by whatever torture. And if an unwise choice should still be made, as the infatuated parties, listen rather to the voice of passion than the voice of God, then love and pity, such as the soul of Christ feels for those who are ignorant and out of the way, should so far intercede for the offenders, that though they may suffer for their rashness, it may not be to their utter undoing.[1]

[1] Bp. Hall's Works, VIII. 470.

When the Lord God saw that it was not good that man should be alone, He gave him as his first especial blessing, not merely a companion or a friend, but a wife, taken out of himself; and, as one with him in body, so to be of the same mind, soul, and spirit. Marriage was in the world before sin; and is in all ages of the world the greatest and most effective antidote against a sin, for which cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. And although sin hath embittered this state, filled the husband's mind with care, and strewed the wife's bed with sorrow in her travail,—yet these, to the holy handmaid of Christ in his Gospel, are but the throes of life and glory; and she shall be saved in child-bearing, if she be found in faith and righteousness. This close and holy relation is the proper scene of piety and patience, of the duty of parents, and the love of dear connexions. It is the center, from which all the loveliest and holiest charities are spread abroad. It fills up the number of the elect, possesses the most sacred and most delicate exercises of friendship, effects the nearest union of hearts, and secures, under a divine blessing, the best, as well as the primary bond of all society. It hath in it

more care, but less danger than unwedded life. It is more joyous, and more sad. It endures more burdens; but when undertaken in the name and according to the will of God, it hath supports which celibacy can never claim, (even when Christ himself is equally the portion of the single,) and those very burdens are delightful.[1] When two walk together, agreed in a gracious harmony of love, by being members of the same mystical body, united thus to each other, and to their glorious Head in the communion of saints, they are better than one. They bear each others burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. The toils of the pilgrimage are thus alleviated and beguiled. The perils of the conflict, and the hardness to be endured by both parties, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, are thus diminished. Each holds over the other, that sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and that shield of faith, whereby the believer is enabled to quench the fiery darts of the wicked. Each exercises in the other's behalf, that fervent grace of an outpoured soul in prayer, whereunto, whether personal or intercessory, is linked the peace of God which passeth all understanding. The sources of

[1] Bp. Taylor's Works, Vol. I. p. 706. Edit. 1836.

happiness in this connexion, may not be discovered by those whom it hath not embraced; but are not on that account less copious, or less pure. It hath joys, like those of an immeasurably higher kind, wherewith a stranger intermeddleth not; and amidst all the causes of agitation in this world of inquietude and sorrow, the believing husband and the believing wife, have a hope more nearly resembling that of the soul's true repose in the Great Head and Bridegroom of the Church, than any other sanctuary upon earth. Under the dispensation of types and shadows, the Old Testament believer saw his Saviour, and tasted of his vast redemption in the blessings of atonement, reconciliation, holiness, and everlasting life through the outward symbol. So is it likewise the privilege of married believers, in this divine union and holy mystery, and most significant emblem, to see, as from some higher eminence than others have attained, the grace and goodness of Jesus to his Church, in giving Himself for it, that He might present it to God complete in Himself, "*not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but holy and without blemish.*"[1]

[1] Eph. v. 27.

When the Apostle tells us, that "*to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded, is life and peace,*"[1] we have only to examine as it were one side of the picture with minute and exact attention. We have only to learn, what is spiritual mindedness, and what its happy issue in the soul's life and peace. We may then almost at once conclude what is its dark opposite, *carnal-mindedness;* and what its tremendous consequences in the soul's eternal death. It is even so in marriage. If it be in the Lord, it is not only the closest and tenderest relation which man or woman can form; but it is amongst the best means of grace, arising out of the providential allotments of God. Nor is there in the all-comprehensive inventory of the Christian's privileges, one thing connected with "the world," better calculated to gird up the loins of his mind, that he may run with patience the race that is set before him, looking to Jesus, as the Holy Ghost gives spiritual breath to his soul, and spiritual swiftness to his feet, and spiritual sight to his faith, than the holy state of wedded life. On the other hand, where passion or caprice, where

[1] Rom. viii. 6.

the wandering of the eye, and the godlessness of the heart,—where the mean and sordid love of wealth, engulphs every higher and nobler aspiration and reason of choice, there are the elements of confusion, of every evil work, and of that sorrow of the world, which worketh the death of all happiness, and like a canker, eats out the heart of every enjoyment. Such unhallowed inducements to marriage, multiply temptation, and make men sin against God, in that solemn relation, which He ordained for their especial solace, support, and holiness. They bear the brand of a more than ordinary ingratitude. And as the serpent distils venom from the fairest flower of the field, so do men by unholy marriages, and disregard of marriage obligations, produce wretchedness and guilt from an institution, of which some of the highest ends in God's purpose of love were peace and goodness. In a word, they who enter upon that estate, to speak after the language of men, cast a die of the greatest interest in the world, next to the last throw for eternity. Life or death, felicity or lasting sorrow, are in the power of marriage.

Be not then unequally yoked together with unbelievers, ye by whom the irrevocable step

hath not been taken; "*for what communion hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what fellowship hath light with darkness; and what concord hath Christ with Belial, and what part hath he that believeth with an infidel.*"[1] And where, if these things be so, are the elements of happiness in such ill-assorted unions? They must be detrimental to personal religion; which can hardly fail of being chilled and withered in an atmosphere so uncongenial. The quarter whence the greatest good might be expected, will be precisely that whence the greatest mischief will be sped. The very connexion which should have provided the greatest and most congenial help, will furnish forth the most active and unavoidable hindrance. And instead of the love of God pervading, the service of God delighting, and the blessing of God enriching such a family, there will be their dark and dismal opposites. In the brightness wherewith carnal expectancy fills and deludes the eye, all these evils and miseries may be unseen, unexpected, deemed to be impossible. Unbelief may cry, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." Or if some sus-

[1] 2 Cor. vi. 15.

picion cross the mind, like the little cloud which Elijah's servant saw from Carmel—no bigger than a man's hand in the surrounding firmament of brightness; yet will it expand, and lower, and darken, until it fill and deform the whole horizon—until it fall at length in a flood, as if the windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the great deep broken up, that so their waters might meet to overwhelm comfort and happiness, and peace, and perhaps life itself, for ever.

Thus believing concerning the ordinance of marriage—his faith being confirmed by individual experience, we possess ample means of explaining

II. *Abraham's conduct in seeking a wife for Isaac out of Mesopotamia.* It was one among the other great designs which occupied the mind of Jehovah, to destroy idolatry, and establish the true worship of God within the boundaries of Canaan. The heathen, with all their abominations, were to be rooted out. No alliance, therefore, was to be made with them; not only lest their idolatries should thus be countenanced, but lest the posterity of the man of God should be involved in their ruin; and lest, even if the people should in after days consent at all to

become God's ministers to cleanse the land, their hearts should be slack, their arms weak, their swords blunted in that holy war. Or, if the land were to be won by God's converting grace, the means which Abraham's posterity might otherwise provide for effecting such a happy change, must be deplorably weakened, if not destroyed, by the spread of that idolatry, even among the seed of the father of the faithful. Abraham therefore, willingly interchanged civilities with, and exhibited towards the Hittites all the characters of social intercourse; yet will he not allow even the bones of his wife to rest among them. How then shall he permit the son of his body, the distinguished heir of God's promises, the depository of God's pure and holy truth, to become by marriage bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, one body, and too probably one spirit with an idolatress? If Abraham's ear had been open to the calls of worldly policy—if Abraham's heart had not been covered with the breastplate of righteousness—if Abraham's eye had been dazzled with the wealth of Canaan, it would perhaps have been easy, as, upon the world's estimate of good, it would have been wise and politic, to have intermarried Isaac with a daughter from

among the elders of Heth. They, in their turn, would doubtless have been still more eager to offer him a wife for the tent of Isaac, than even a burial-place for the bones of Sarah. But he who already had learned by faith to glory only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which, as its doctrine of salvation was received into his soul, the world was crucified to him, and he to the world, deemed all wealth, all honours, all distinctions, all tempting reversions, but as dust in the balance compared with Isaac's union to one, who knew, and loved, and served the God of his salvation. He therefore demanded by an oath—(and that not an ordinary oath, but one immediately connected with the covenant of grace and salvation,[1]) that his servant, unto whom this important matter was committed, should not take a wife unto his son of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom he dwelt, but rather go into his own country of Mesopotamia, and to his kindred, and take a wife unto his son Isaac. And why unto Mesopotamia? Because there, amidst many de-

[1] See Ainsworth on the Pentateuch, and Willett's Hexapla in Genesin. Jacob demands the same form of oath, manifestly connected with the same covenant, from his son Joseph. Gen. xlvii. 29, 30.

basing and defiling intermixtures of idolatry, the knowledge of the true God was yet maintained, as we learn from the chapter before us, as well as from other parts of scripture. Laban and Bethuel owned, when they heard the servants' message, that the thing proceeded from Jehovah; and that consequently they had no independent power either to confirm or contradict it. In after days, when Laban and Jacob had ended their strife, the former invoked Jehovah to watch between them; and called upon the God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the common God of their father, to judge betwixt them. Nahor had forsaken Chaldean idolatry, and with Melcha his wife had settled in Haran, where he worshipped Jehovah, having probably accompanied Abraham and Terah from Ur to Haran, but no further. In the same holy dread of leading a beloved child into idolatry, did it become a grief of mind—a bitterness of spirit unto Isaac and Rebekah, that Esau their first born took for wives two daughters of the Hittites.[1] In the same spirit did Rebekah herself cry unto Isaac. "*I am weary of my life, because of the daugh-*

[1] Gen. xxvi. 34.

ters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"[1] In the same zeal for the holiness of that people, whom He had constituted a nation of priests to Himself, did Jehovah require, "*Thou shalt make no marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son: for they will turn away thy sons from following Me, that they may serve other gods, so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.*"[2] O that there were such a mind in every parent—a mind which in holy eagerness for its own salvation, counted all things but loss to win Christ: and in yearning zeal and love for souls so dear as the souls of children, deemed all things worthless and vile compared with Him as their portion! We should then see our professing Christianity, by no laggard steps or slow degrees reclaimed from its earthiness, and rising towards that beauty of holiness, that measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, which is its real character, and which should therefore be the high

[1] Gen. xxvii. 46. [2] Deut. vii. 3, 4.

aim of all who name the name of Jesus, as their Saviour, their Portion, and their Joy.

Abraham entrusts this whole affair to his confidential servant, in order to avoid placing in Isaac's way the temptation which might await him in Mesopotamia, whereby he might be induced to remain there, become the citizen of another country, and attach himself to that family, of which a scion should be engrafted on himself. There might be, and indeed certainly was, danger lest it should thus happen; and he who had received the promises, was unwilling that such peril should overtake his son. But why may not Isaac travel himself into Syria? Why may he not settle in the land of Padan-Aram, if he there find a wife, on whom his love may fix itself, and if he may there with her enjoy the happiness, for which his father desires to see him married? May he not carry a better, a more pure, and therefore a more befitting worship of Jehovah thither; and with it all the blessings and mercies of that everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, to him, and to his seed? He may at all events wait there, until his father's death, and then return, to inherit the wealth wherewith God had blessed Abraham, and have that blessing

still transmitted to himself, in its most ample extent. Worldly wisdom might thus take counsel with flesh and blood: but the faith of Abraham saw with a clearer eye, and decided with a better judgment. The servant said unto him, "Peradventure, the woman will not be willing to follow me into this land, must I need bring thy son again into the land from whence thou comest? And Abraham said, Beware that thou bring not my son thither again. The Lord God of heaven which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, unto thy seed will I give this land: He shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again. Isaac had not in reality ever been in Mesopotamia at all; and therefore in strictness of speaking, Abraham's servant could enter into no family alliance which might lead him thither "again." But Abraham spake as a believer brought out, (and in him all his posterity likewise,) from a land of deep and dark idolatry; and therefore Isaac's removal towards it would be a

kind of return thither, which he absolutely and peremptorily forbade.

Abraham by faith had sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country. Of that country he had not received the promise, but had seen it afar off, and embraced it together with all God's gracious engagements that were linked with it, especially the engagement of transcendent love, that the world's Redeemer should arise from his seed, and that Canaan was but a type of the everlasting rest of God's glorified family. Canaan therefore had become to him more precious than all the world beside. To have turned his own back upon it, or to have willingly allowed that Isaac should leave it, would have been nothing less than a profane permission that this child of promise should despise his spiritual birthright, and make light of that "city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." The Canaanites were not Abraham's countrymen. Canaan, except in Jehovah's promise, and his own gracious adoption of it, was not his own land. But it is the inheritance bestowed upon him by the Lord, and thither must Isaac's wife be brought, there must Isaac live, die, and be buried, as Sarah's bones had been there laid to rest, and

as Abraham's must soon be deposited by them. Well did the beloved apostle write, as the Holy Ghost directed his pen, and taught his heart to feel the truth, "*This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*"[1] Truly, if Abraham had been mindful of that country from whence he came out, he might have had opportunity to have returned; but he desired a better country, that is a heavenly. Truly if Abraham had been less solicitous concerning the spiritual prosperity of Isaac,—if he had put it and his son's probable opportunities of earthly advancement in Syria into the false balances, and weighed them with the deceitful weights of carnal policy and prudence, he might have permitted Isaac to negotiate his own marriage in Mesopotamia, or permitted his servant to agree that he should go thither to pitch his tent, and live and die. But Abraham's faith had not so learned Christ; it had not so reckoned to compare temporal prosperity, (a deadly snare if unsanctified, rather than a blessing) with the joys and glories of an eternal inheritance, whereof Canaan was the type. He had found the treasure hid in the field; he had enjoyed

[1] John v. 4.

its riches, the unsearchable riches of Christ. He had sold all that he had, to buy that field; he had gone out into the place which he should afterward receive for an inheritance, (the visible sign for the mightier blessing signified,) not knowing whither he went. He had found Him whom his soul loved; he held Him therefore, and would not let Him go. And what Christ, and Christ's kingdom, seen in the typical mirror of Canaan, were to himself, it was his duty to provide, as far as in him lay, that they should be to Isaac: therefore he would not let him go to marry, and perhaps to abide in Haran.

Would to God that all who profess the faith of Christ crucified were in this, as in other matters like-minded with Abraham, towards their children, in every plan for their important change from single to married life. If they are resolved to know nothing, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified, as their own hope and portion, their wealth, their blessedness; then they can give no better proof of loving their children as their own souls, than by postponing every other consideration to such a connexion for life, as may, through the work of the Holy Ghost, advance their growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then trust, in the full assurance of faith, that all other things shall be added unto you. Solomon's holy choice will have Solomon's gracious reward. "*Behold, I have given thee wisdom to discern judgment; and I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour.*"[1] *Godliness,* (and it can have no more unequivocal display, than in accounting a spirit of vital holiness as the first element of happiness in a husband or a wife,) "*is great riches; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*"[2]

Mark, in conclusion, *The calm and quietude which Abraham is enabled to enjoy, in a matter so pregnant with unhallowed anxiety to the hearts of many who yet profess to be his spiritual seed.* "The Lord God of heaven . . . He shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence." He has a persuasion of success, with an abundance of peace, and a foretaste of joy in that persuasion. The walk of Christian faith is the walk of light; and faith itself sees accomplishment, where sense dares not hope. And what is the lesson

[1] 1 Kings iii. 13. [2] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

to ourselves, "*Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He will bring it to pass; in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.*"[1] Difficulties may arise, discouragements may darken around; but to the faithful, a light ariseth in this darkness, and they see beyond it. They believe, they hope, they enjoy, and they glorify God. It is Jehovah's own promise by the Spirit, "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusted in Thee.*"[2] Heaven and earth may pass away, but that word shall not pass away.

[1] Psalm xxxvii. 5. [2] Isa. xxvi. 3.

SERMON XXXVIII.

ABRAHAM BLESSED IN A FAITHFUL SERVANT.

GENESIS XXIV. 9, 10.

AND THE SERVANT PUT HIS HAND UNDER THE THIGH OF ABRAHAM HIS MASTER, AND SWARE TO HIM CONCERNING THAT MATTER. AND THE SERVANT TOOK TEN CAMELS OF THE CAMELS OF HIS MASTER, AND DEPARTED; FOR ALL THE GOODS OF HIS MASTER WERE IN HIS HAND: AND HE AROSE, AND WENT TO MESOPOTAMIA, UNTO THE CITY OF NAHOR.

EVERY action of our lives should originate in a holy motive, and be directed towards a holy end. The rule is equally applicable, whether the act be among the most ordinary, or the most important of our lives. But this simplicity of purpose and singleness of aim are not enough to make our conduct acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ. We must be equally scrupulous and jealous respecting the measures we adopt, and the agents whom we employ. The glory of our Heavenly Father must be supremely

regarded in the choice of instruments, not less than in a selection of the objects to be pursued.

Such wise and holy caution is taught us by the example of Abraham. The promised Seed in whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed must spring from Isaac. A wife therefore must be sought for him—not from any family amidst the dark and dismal idolatries, wherewith the world was overspread; but from one where Jehovah was known and worshipped and served, with whatever debasing intermixtures of superstitious devotion. On this point, Abraham is immoveable and peremptory. The wife of his son must be a believer; the land of promise must not be forsaken; lest he should despise his spiritual birthright. If no help, therefore, meet for Isaac may be found in the land and house of his kindred, he will leave the matter with God. He is assured, that although ordinary means fail, a miracle shall vindicate divine veracity; and that Isaac, whatever hindrances may appear, shall no more go childless to the grave, than himself, in whom all the divine engagements had been fulfilled to the letter.

But the messenger employed to effect Abraham's holy design, must be a man after his own heart; one who will carry out his principles,

be animated by his Spirit, count all other things of little moment, compared with the great duty of effecting a godly marriage for his son: and thus of perpetuating the knowledge of salvation, the love of Jehovah, and the holy walk of faith in his privileged family. For this purpose he chose the eldest, or ruling servant in his house; most probably that Eliezer of Damascus who has been already introduced to our notice, (Gen. xv. 2.) and whom he regarded almost as a son, while yet he remained childless. The proceedings of a domestic servant, in a matter of private and family interest, may appear little worth the record to a profane and unspiritual eye. And so in very truth they would be, had not the Holy Spirit been the historian. But his wisdom has chosen subjects best fitted to promote spiritual edification; if only they shall be regarded with reference to the work of faith, the pleading of prayer, and the manifest dealings of God. So connected, they demand our humble and our serious consideration. So connected, the Holy Ghost addresses us in the history. Eliezer is brought forward by Him as the Teacher, not only of such as serve in families, but of all who serve the Lord Christ, within whatever sphere of

relative obligation they may be employed. Thus appealed to, there should be an answer from every heart, whom that Spirit addresses, "*Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth.*"[1]

In prosecuting this subject, I propose to exhibit—

THE CHARACTER OF ELIEZER, AS A PATTERN FOR IMITATION BY SERVANTS, AND BY ALL. It is the duty of every ruler, whether called in divine providence to direct the affairs, and influence the prosperity of an empire, or to exercise controul within the more narrow, but dearer limits of a house and a family, to provide that all its members should own the authority of God, and obey his will, under the constraining motive of the love of Christ. And whether his own deep and solemn responsibilities, or the peace and welfare of his house, and its circle of domestic love be considered, the personal character of his servants is of the highest consequence. His household should be a Church of the living God, a pillar and ground of the truth throughout every degree of rank which it may contain; just as the life of God should pervade every member of the Catholic body of Christ's

[1] 1 Sam. iii. 9.

visible Church, from the monarch on the throne to the beggar at his palace gate.

If there is to be concord in the fellowship, wisdom in the rule, and love in the obedience of any house, the word of truth must guide, and the Spirit of charity must influence the hearts and doings of those who compose the family membership. It therefore becomes alike the duty and interest of the master or the mistress to provide, not only that their servants should be morally, or prudentially honest, truthful, peaceable, and industrious; but influenced by the love of God, and by the power of his grace, as true disciples of Jesus Christ. Such servants as these come into a Christian family, as Jacob into that of Laban; and for their sakes that house hath the visitations of heavenly favour. "*I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.*"[1] Or as Joseph entered the family of Potiphar, "*and the Lord blessed the Eyyptian's house for Joseph's sake.*"[2] When Pharaoh looked around for one who might be set over the land of Egypt for its need —little as he reckoned perhaps of the true Jehovah; yet concerning a proper depository for

[1] Gen. xxx. 27. [2] Gen. xxxix. 5.

such high charge he said, "*Can we find such an one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?*"[1] How much more then does such holy caution beseem those, who know that "*Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it*"[2]—that if the house be divided against itself, and religion set against irreligion within its walls, its peace and spiritual prosperity cannot be maintained. One sinner may thus destroy much good! The consistent dedication of a house to God demands a diligent search after such as may dwell together, in the charity of their common Gospel, keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The duty of servants is neither to be measured by the splendour of the family, nor the gains of the place, but by the order of God, who requires them "*with good will to do service, as to the Lord, and not to men.*"[3] They must seek from the Fountain of good that wisdom from above, whereby they may be taught to regard their station, not as a hardship, not as a disgrace, but as the post which God's fatherly love has commanded them to fill, and where the providence of his appointment is linked with the grace of

[1] Gen. xli. 38. [2] Psalm cxxvii. 1. [3] Eph. vi. 7.

his purpose, that being not their own, but bought with a price, they should in their allotted station, glorify Him in their bodies, and in their spirits, which are his.

These preliminary remarks will be illustrated by bringing them to the test of experiment in the character of Eliezer.

(I.) *We notice then his entire conscientiousness.* Abraham requires from him the solemnity of an oath, that he will not take a wife unto his son of the daughters of the Canaanites. But highly as he honoured the father of the faithful —clearly as he was persuaded that Abraham would never willingly place him within the possible danger of perjury, yet will he not swear by the God of heaven, until his way shall be made perfectly plain, the path wherein he is to walk distinctly marked out, and the alternative clearly defined, if he shall not succeed in his message. The purpose of Abraham, the happiness of Isaac, the holiness and life of his own soul may be periled, unless the command be fully understood, and with it the exact extent and character of his own obligation. The servant said unto him, "Peradventure, the woman will not be willing to follow me into this land: must I needs bring thy son again into the land from

whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware that thou bring not my son thither again." He then expresses the full assurance of a triumphant faith, that his covenant God would send an angel to help his embassy, and provide a wife unto Isaac from his own family—but adds, "If the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again." The mind of Eliezer was thus set at ease, because the direction was explicit. He therefore hesitated no longer, but sware to his master concerning that matter; and at once resolved in the strength of Almightiness to do his mission.

In the performance of our duty, especially the most important and confidential, something must be left to the discretion of a servant. But it is a matter of wise and holy prudence, that the direction sought should be as explicit as possible. The probabilities of an exact and conscientious fulfilment of the trust, in dependence on a blessing from God will thus be proportionately increased, while tendencies to pride and self-complacency, are in the same degree diminished.

Another instance of this gracious conscien-

tiousness is exhibited farther onwards in the beautiful history before us. When brought by a happy providence into the house of Bethuel, weary with his journey, needing food, and tempted by the refreshments which ready hospitality spread before him, He said, "I will not eat, until I have told mine errand." The demands of personal want, however urgent—the pleasures of food and rest, however needful and attractive, must not prevail to postpone the message which brought him into Mesopotamia. They must not precede a thankful testimony to the hand of God, which hath so well sped him on his journey, so wonderfully blessed him at its close, and placed him in a position to declare his errand, on which depended, not merely the happiness of his master, and his master's son, but the welfare, the very existence of the Church of God. "He said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand." When the message is delivered, and the great object of his zeal happily finished, no solicitations can hinder him from an immediate return, that he may give an account of his stewardship, and present to Isaac one whom he may love, one who may be a help meet for him; one with whom he may glorify God, in the blessed

charities of holy faith, one with whom he may look forward with the eye of a believer's hope upon the Saviour of the world, and the blessedness of the Church in Him.

In the morning he said, "Send me away unto my master." They would have constrained him to abide a few days—at the least ten; but he was resolute. He said unto them, "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away, that I may go unto my master." Here is an instructive example to us all, whether in the duties wherewith God hath charged us to make our own calling and election sure, or in any other imaginable state and circumstance of life. Here is conscientiousness, clear, transparent conscientiousness, in undertaking the office—against which the voice of selfishness is not permitted a moment's pleading. Instead of allowing a happy issue of the negociation to compound for a little indulgence, this grace puts wings of fire as it were upon the soul of Eliezer, that he may return and testify of the success wherewith his journey hath been prospered, to the happiness of Abraham, and the glory of God. Whether we rule or serve, whether we be aged or infants in the divine life, whether we be stewards over the family of

God, or occupy places in it more obscure, a deep, abiding conscientiousness and sense of duty should never allow us to repose, while any progress in our work yet remains before us. "*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth towards those things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*" [1] "I have meat to eat, that ye know not of," said the Messenger of the Everlasting Covenant to his wondering disciples—"*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish his work.*" [2] O thou Eternal Son, and faithful servant of the Father, infuse a portion of thy love and thy Spirit into our hearts; that in devoted conscientiousness to the will of God, as Thou wert, so we may be in the world!

And mark the preciousness of a master's example upon the character and conduct of a servant. Abraham had himself done the bidding of God in strict and unswerving conscientiousness. He had forsaken Ur of the Chaldees, friends, family, country, connexions, long formed

[1] Phil. iii. 12, 14. [2] John iv. 34.

habits, and enjoyments long endeared, to go forth at God's command, not knowing whither he went. And now he is blessed with a servant willing to do the same for him; and that under the high impulse of the same gracious faith. Here, as elsewhere—here, as in every imaginable variety of circumstances and relations, there is a mighty influence in the power of example. The holy or the unbelieving conduct of masters or mistresses terminates not in their own good or evil: it must become a help or a snare to others, not less than a blessing or a curse to themselves.

(2.) Again. *The prayerful spirit of Eliezer is recorded for our instruction.* There is nothing of that atheistical independence of God, nothing of that awful self-confidence, which would thrust the Most High aside from his sovereignty over, and supreme direction of all things, whether the meanest or the mightiest, both in heaven and earth. The devout servant had no sooner accomplished his journey to the city of Nahor, and placed his weary camels in the posture of repose, than we hear him pleading with God, as doubtless he had done throughout the way, "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good

speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham." He had put himself into the way: but he knows not how to proceed; and therefore begs direction and a blessing, from a quarter, whence they were never withheld. He appeals to the covenant God of Abraham. He hath therefore matter for supplication, whereon faith may lay hold; a rock of assurance; whereon it may rest and exceeding great and precious promises, whereby he may be amply encouraged. And where is that lowly, that believing supplicant, who ever sought the throne of grace, through the mercies of the everlasting covenant, and its Great High Priest, and yet returned without a blessing suited to his need? Who can doubt that Abraham followed Eliezer with earnest prayer? Who can doubt that while Eliezer journied onwards, his master was pleading for him in the tent? Who can doubt that Isaac, whom Eliezer, returning with Rebekah, found meditating, or praying at even-time, in the field, was a frequent supplicant, that God's providence would endow him with his best earthly gift by Eliezer's instrumentality? Here then, is a concert for prayer, between the parties especially concerned in the momentous errand, which

brought it, as heard and answered in heaven, to its blessed issue. And were the same gracious consent and sympathy universal—were there a meeting of the souls of those who send, and of those who are sent, at the throne of grace—did both parties continue in prayer for each other, and watch in the same, with thanksgiving, the windows of heaven would be opened, and the hand of God would pour down a blessing upon every house, so that there should not be room to receive it. If Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God alone give the increase; how shall the master expect, how shall the servant anticipate good, when neither pray—while a careless command is an insult to the Most High, and a prayerless endeavour to execute it equally revolting to his honour? However ingeniously we may presume ourselves to have adapted the means to the end, there is no connecting link between them for a happy issue, except it be a prayerful dependence upon the wise and gracious sovereignty of our covenant God.

Look into the history! Behold, how greatly prayer is owned, and honoured, and heard and answered of God! "It came to pass, that before he had done speaking, Rebekah came out," with her pitcher upon her shoulder.

The speed of light, as it travels from its glorious fountain in the firmament, is inconceivable; but it is the snail's laggard pace, compared with the swiftness of our heavenly Father's love, to receive the prayers of his children in Christ Jesus, and to relieve their need, according to his riches in glory. "It shall come to pass, that before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear." The Church was gathered together pleading with God for Peter's deliverance, when the freed Apostle presented himself at the gate and appeared among them. Were this fervid, this earnest, this wrestling spirit of faith more familiar to us; were it breathed into our souls, as the atmosphere in which their life is best maintained, our experience would testify of the same mercy, our infant faith would be cradled in the arms of God, and would grow up unto a healthy assurance, to the advancement of our own happiness, and the glory of Jehovah.

A question may arise, whether Eliezer be justified in asking a distinct sign, whereby he might depend upon a successful termination to his important mission. Is it becoming that he should thus appear to limit the God of Abraham, by crying, "Behold, I stand here by the

well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, drink, and I will give thy camels drink also; let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and whereby I shall know that thou hast shewed kindness to my master?" If it be answered, that before he had done speaking, Rebekah came out of the city, and fulfilled to the very letter the sign which he had ventured to beg from God, thus justifying his procedure, the objection might still be urged, that prayer may be apparently answered, and yet be displeasing to the Most High. True: but some sign appeared almost needful, in the utter inability of Eliezer to know how his steps must be guided. Thus Moses found his rod changed into a serpent, in proof that his mission was divine, and his success infallible. Thus Gideon besought a double sign, that the fleece should be wetted with the dews of heaven, while the earth around it was dry; and again that it should remain unwatered, while moisture fell on every side of it. Thus graciously did Almighty God permit to Heze-

kiah a sign that he should recover from his disease, when the sun went back ten degrees upon the dial of Ahaz, whereby it had gone down; and he knew that the God of his mercies had added unto his life fifteen years.

This earnest enquiry had in it nothing of the superstitions of heathen ceremonies or auguries; but only desired a moral demonstration of character which might point out the female suited to become the wife of a believer in God. Eliezer asks no sign through doubt of divine power, or distrust of God's verity; nor as prescribing the path, wherein Eternal Wisdom should walk to accomplish his wishes. On the other hand, the request springs from a full reliance in divine providence, and an earnest desire to be assured of Jehovah's good pleasure. The prayer was devout, and had its impulse in the secret motions of the Holy Ghost, whereby he was guided into all truth.

In our own day, the full, clear, plain, and infallible declarations of God's holy word, are a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths, instead of those more rare, but solemn impulses made upon the minds of heaven's favourites in the cloudy day of patriarchal revelation. We have a guide, a directory leading us to the will

of God with infallible certainty,—a record not to be consulted by lot, or by superstitious application of any single passage that suddenly meets the eye: but by its own full and blessed general meaning, testifying of the mind of God, applicable to every situation in which we can be placed, and resolving every difficulty whereby we can be harassed. Our heavenly Father indeed, often calls us to regard the leadings of his providence, attending our way, as the eastern star led the wise men to the Epiphany of the incarnate God. But the believer's surest guide is that spiritual sun, which shines in the word of God, like the pillar of fire to the heritage of God in the wilderness. And by that word, should every apparent providential direction be tested, that we may know whether there is safety in following it.

(3.) *The holy thankfulness of Eliezer must not be passed over in silence.*

His prayer had entered with acceptance into the ears of the Lord of Hosts. God indeed, had done for him exceeding abundantly, above all that he could ask or think. Rebekah's ready kindness had realized the secret wishes of his heart, and its silent aspirations of prayer to God. He had found her moreover, to be of

Abraham's kindred; and all that Abraham's heart could wish. What then remained, but thankfully to take the blessing, and own with adoring gratitude, the hand of love from which it came. "The man bowed down his head and worshipped the Lord. And he said, blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master, of his mercy and his truth; I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." He waits not until his work thus well begun is completed to Abraham's wish, and Rebekah delivered into Isaac's bosom. But he waves this first fruit of a happy issue before God, in thankfulness and hope. And thus it should ever be. A Christian's harp should be attuned and struck to the praise of God, at the first appearance of a mercy. When Israel was saved with that mighty deliverance from the wrath of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, and saw their enemies dead on the sea shore, Moses waited not until they had entered Canaan, and sheathed their swords, and furled their victorious banners in the land of rest and promise. There and then, with the miracle before their eyes, but with many a day of stern and sanguinary conflict yet awaiting them, he

taught them that song of gratitude and praise, which shall mingle its sweetness with the song of the Lamb, to be sung by the redeemed and sanctified of God for ever. A stronger confidence in God for the future will be produced upon the mind, by a spirit of praise and thankfulness. He is the happy man, who can store up the covenant mercies of God in his memory; feed his faith with thoughts of what hath been already done for him, and thence argue himself into a full and happy persuasion of all future mercies, of which he may stand in need, linked as all are to each other, and to God's everlasting purpose, in the immoveable stability of his gracious covenant. He can thank God and take courage. "*Thou hast delivered my soul from death, wilt Thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the land of the living?*"[1] "*The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.*"[2]

Again, when Abraham's servant received the consent of Bethuel and Laban to his suit for Rebekah—when they said, "The thing pro-

[1] Psalm lvi. 13. [2] 1 Sam. xvii. 37.

ceedeth from the Lord, we cannot speak unto thee bad or good; Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, go, and let her be thy master's wife as the Lord hath spoken," he worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth. Prayer marks every stage of his progress: every resting place by the way hath its stone of help and altar of praise: and thus the whole pilgrimage is happy, precisely because it is holy. "*Whatsoever therefore ye do, whether in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.*"[1] Mercies have their proper end when they are thankfully remembered. What plea more powerful (subordinate to the great ground of hope in the merit of Christ Jesus) for obtaining new blessings, than proof that the old have not been abused? We are encouraged to cast seed again into that ground, whose last crop witnesses, that it was not altogether barren. It was on the other hand Hezekiah's shame, that he rendered not again, according to the benefit done unto him.[2] And if there be so much sweetness, so much cause of praise for temporal deliverances, how vast, how unimaginably vast, is the cause

[1] Col. iii. 17. [2] Owen's Works, XV. 108.

and ground of thankfulness in that eternal redemption which we have in the blood of Jesus. We rejoice and bless God, for ordinary providences successfully overruled, unless we are living without Him in the world. How earnestly then should we bless his holy Name, how loud should be the song, how deep the soul's thankfulness, for those promised and purchased mercies connected with salvation from the wrath to come, in the person, and finished mediation of Jesus Christ! Well may it possess our thoughts, and fill our minds. "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*[1]"

The grace of God is confined to no external situation of life. It gilds and beautifies the lowliest, as brightly as the loftiest stations which can be occupied by the children of God. Gracious conscientiousness, fervent prayer, adoring praise for temporal and spiritual mercies, all freely given, and the latter eternally secured in Christ Jesus, where they meet in those who govern, and in those who serve, are a threefold cord of common blessings that cannot easily be broken. The son of peace dwells in that house, his peace shall rest upon it: and

[1] Psalm ciii. 1.

men shall take knowledge of its inmates that they have been with Jesus.

Daily experience confirms the infallible testimony of the Holy Ghost. "*Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*"[1] The faith of Abraham honoured God by an implicit reliance upon his guiding, overruling providence, to bless and prosper the measures adopted for procuring a wife unto Isaac; and in preferring a worshipper of his name to any of the wealthier daughters of the idolaters among whom he dwelt. The faith and zeal of Eliezer honoured God likewise, in the spirit wherewith he undertook his charge; in the confiding supplication in which he commended his work of duty to the covenant Jehovah of his master; in the fidelity of his conduct; and in the overflowing praise of a grateful heart for the mercy that had embraced him on every side.

Rebekah's will was overruled by the same mysterious power which had brought about this harmony and concurrence of events. "Her brother, and her mother called Rebekah, and asked her, Wilt thou go with this man? and

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

she said, I will go." They dismissed her with a blessing: she took that blessing with her from her father's house, and brought it into Isaac's tent. There it abode with her, and made her a treasure of happiness to her husband, and all that he had. The journey homewards was no less prosperous than that of Eliezer into Mesopotamia. Hope had been fulfilled; faith had now become vision; prayer had been answered; and praise had been given.

Isaac was gone forth to meditate in the field at eventide, or as the margin tells us to seek God in prayer—to pour out his soul in that deep silence, in that calm and still repose which needs not language whereby to commune with God. He was realizing God's presence within the depths of the heart, holding happy fellowship there with Him in a quiet enjoyment of his love, and committing himself to his fatherly tenderness with a confidence of dependence that kept him in perfect peace, amidst all causes of anxiety and uncertainty. While thus meditating in the cool of the day, Isaac lifted up his eyes, and saw, and behold, the camels were coming. This was the crisis of his life, the turning point of his happiness or sorrow. It came upon him in the best of all possible attitudes and employ-

ments—in the attitude of faith, and the exercise of prayer. And never yet did any event, of whatever outward character and complexion, find a believer in Christ Jesus on the knees of his heart, that did not come charged with the blessing, and filled with the love of God.

Rebekah also beheld Isaac, heard that he was the husband unto whom the Most High had sent her; lighted from her camel; veiled herself in token of humility; and approached Isaac, with those outward manifestations of submissive respect, which gave him the assurance of a life of gracious obedience to him, as her head. "The servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her." The tears of pious sorrow, shed in filial love for his mother, over whose death he had mourned three years, were dried up in the joys of his new relation. The dutiful child was thus disciplined, to receive, and to bestow happiness, as a husband, blessed and honoured of God; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. This important transaction, begun, continued, and ended in God—a work of faith, and a labour of love, was not in vain in the Lord. Isaac and

Rebekah were of one mind, lived in peace, and the God of love and peace was with them.

The subject thus considered calls upon me to address a word

I. *To Masters, and Heads of Families.*

Unto what source shall we trace the holy, prayerful, zealous, self-devoted, conscientious behaviour of Eliezer in this whole matter? We hear not of any especial means of grace, or manifestations of God given to him before he undertook his momentous errand. He had doubtless profited, as God the Holy Spirit enabled him, by the faithfulness of Abraham's instruction, the constancy of Abraham's family sacrifice, and the holy consistency of Abraham's daily walk. And next to the claims of parental love, —inferior only to the calls of kindred upon our affection, are those appeals to our consciences, enlightened, converted, sanctified by the Spirit of God, which the domestics of our families are warranted to make for consistent Christian kindness and zeal in their behalf. They should be treated with the gentleness and condescension of a love, enkindled by the love of Christ Jesus towards ourselves. They should be regarded, not as those who are born to be the vassals of our will, but as those who bear a yoke

of meekness and charity, such as that beneath which the Saviour hath bowed our own hearts, if we are members of his body. They should be treated as humble friends, partners in the same salvation, heirs of the same hopes, and purchased from death to life eternal by the same infinitely precious Atonement. The pious head of a family is an unspeakable blessing to all who are embraced within the endearing charities of its circle,—an instrument of their present happiness, and a helper of them towards the joys of that better state, where earthly and present distinctions shall pass away, and be no more for ever.

II. *To Servants.*

While Eliezer received many blessings at Abraham's hand, as an instrument of God for his good, was he enabled to make no return? Let this history, let his whole conduct, let Abraham's answered prayers and wishes, let Isaac's happiness in Rebekah attest the contrary. Well and amply was Abraham repaid for all that he had done in the behalf of Eliezer. And could the grateful steward have any higher delight, after remembering that he had a Master in heaven, to whom his first thoughts and responsibilities were due, than to know, that he

had thus been honoured of God to promote the happiness of his earthly Master, and the good of the Church? Imitate his example in your humble spheres of duty. Employ your single talent for the glory of Him, whose you are, and whom you ought to serve. So shall those among whom you live bless the love of the Lord of all, in sending you to them, and glorify God in you.

SERMON XXXIX.

ELIEZER'S ERRAND ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE.

GENESIS XXIV. 67.

AND ISAAC BROUGHT HER INTO HIS MOTHER SARAH'S TENT, AND TOOK REBEKAH, AND SHE BECAME HIS WIFE, AND HE LOVED HER.

THOSE students of the Bible, whose turn of mind is imaginative and mystical are tempted to discover types and allegories, even in its most plain and simple portions. The indulgence of this tendency opens, as hath been already remarked,[1] a path as dangerous as it is attractive. Unless the disposition be restrained and chastened, unless it be watched with constancy, and disciplined with severity, God's revelation has no security against being called

[1] See Sermon XXX.

to speak a language which was never contemplated by the mind of the Holy Spirit. The wholesome current of truth and mercy is thus polluted by human admixtures. When readers are more willing to bring a sense to the Scriptures, than to receive one from them, they substitute the broken cisterns of their own unauthorized device, for those wells of salvation, out of which more simple-hearted students draw the water of life with joy and gladness. Their practice serves not to illustrate, but to darken and discredit the mysteries of God. The Church has suffered to a painful extent by the unbridled licence of what is commonly called spiritual interpretation.

We would not venture therefore, after the manner of some expositors, to affirm, that the mission of Abraham's servant to provide a wife for Isaac, is to be decidedly regarded as an allegory of the ministerial office—Eliezer himself being the unequivocal representative of the ambassador of Christ. Nor would we assert, that the marriage of the heir of promise with Rebekah, is absolutely typical of that near and endearing espousal, whereby the Incarnate Word hath betrothed the Church of believers, and every member within its pale of salvation

to Himself, in loving-kindness, and mercies, and faithfulness. But "God hath consecrated the state of matrimony to such an excellent mystery, that in it is signified and represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church. They who have taken Him for their portion by faith, are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. The page of God brings Isaac under our notice, in a light decidedly spiritual and emblematical. The parallel between him and our Lord, (to say nothing of St. Paul's allegory Gal. iv.) is also of a typical kind. We can hardly therefore err in regarding this transaction before us, as exhibiting a beautiful resemblance of the marriage ordained of God between his Son and the Church; and the office of his ministers as instruments to bring about its accomplishment. Thus viewed, we may consider from this history,

I. The Duty of a Preacher of the Gospel.

In the revelation of mercy it is God's plan and purpose to bring men to salvation, by spiritual union with his dear Son. Of that union, no idea more significant, or more tender could be represented to the human mind, than

that of marriage; which links the hearts and minds of husband and wife in bonds of such supreme and mysterious tenderness.

(1.) *To effect this counsel of stupendous love, to save sinners, advance our humanity to the highest possible excellence, and glorify his Son, as the Head and Husband of his Church, a ministry of the word is appointed of God.* A message of reconciliation, and overtures of spiritual union are committed to a body of men: and upon them rests the solemn responsibility of fulfilling the mind of God in this matter, so far forth as rests with human agency. "*Let a man therefore so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.*"[1] We have entered into the most solemn vows and obligations to give ourselves wholly unto this office, whereunto it hath pleased God to call us. The oath of Eliezer, exacted from him by Abraham, was not more straitly binding upon his conscience in the sight of God, than is the sacred engagement of his ministers to fulfil their high and awful undertaking towards the parties with whom they have to do,—God the Father who sends them; God the Son,

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 1.

on whose behalf they act, to seek the Bride, the Lamb's wife; God the Holy Ghost, who can alone prosper their message; and the souls of men whom they are sent to persuade into the blessedness of a spiritual and everlasting union with Jesus Christ. There is a divine commission for authority; divine love for a constraining motive; divine promises, exceeding great and precious, for an encouragement; and an end unimaginably glorious and blessed, to occupy the mind, and make us "*press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*" [1] To guide our way there is a divine directory, the record of truth infallible, the express mind of God. And looking towards it in faith, we shall discern the Holy Ghost within it; as the Angel of the covenant dwelt in the pillar of fire, to lead Israel in peace and safety through the wilderness.

(2.) *Eliezer was not sent in an especial manner by Abraham to any individual; but generally to the house of his family in Mesopotamia:* although God in his secret purpose had determined that Rebekah should be chosen, and brought into Isaac's bosom as his wife. Our

[1] Phil. iii. 14.

commission names no person in particular. We are sent upon a comprehensive errand, to seek among you a Bride for the Saviour; to tell our message universally, within the scope and sphere of its extent; to proclaim the love of God, and the glory of Christ, to all without exception. We must draw the bow at a venture; while God, according to his secret and supreme prerogative, directs the arrow of conviction and persuasion between the joints of the harness, pierces the heart, subdues it with love, and overrules its affections, to seek, and be possessed by the Saviour. We go forth therefore, in much outward uncertainty, like Abraham's steward, not knowing who shall believe our report, or unto whom the arm of the Lord shall be revealed. But we trust (and except in this confidence God's messengers can have no comfort) that He who, having commanded Philip the Deacon into the wilderness, brought the Eunuch of Ethiopia to hear at his lips the words of eternal life in the Gospel of Jesus, will lead us, we being in the way of his appointment, to the house of our master's brethren; and by the almighty persuasion of his grace, will enable us to succeed in his cause.

(3.) *Eliezer had no commission beyond that*

ef espousing a wife, as Isaac's proxy. Such is the ground, upon which the ministers of the everlasting Gospel stand in their momentous errand. There is indeed a kind of resemblance between our office, and the conjugal relation, which yet is not that of principals. It was in the great Apostle's eye, when he said to them of Corinth, "*I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*" [1] Many ministers may go forth, thus to seek and thus to receive the vows of the Church; but they are as the proxies whom the King sends out to effect the marriage for his son; to receive the bride in his name; and to conduct her to the family of her new adoption. There is one Bridegroom, one Husband. Our work is accomplished, our trust fulfilled, when that is done; except as to teaching the happy bride thus united to her glorious Head, how she shall behave herself in the house of the Living God; how she shall love Him day by day more intensely; how she shall be continually led to delight more exclusively in Him, and commune with Him more intimately,

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 2.

to her soul's increasing likeness to Him in holiness.

Abraham's faithful servant loved Rebekah for Isaac's sake. He set his heart upon her, that she might be Isaac's wife. For this end he rejoiced over her; for this end he sought her, and obtained her. During a little season, and in an inferior sense, she was united to him; but only as a fellow-traveller, that by him she might be brought unto his distinguished master, in the land of Canaan. All the tender care which a minister takes of those to whom he is sent as a kind of spiritual husband, to provide for them, to lead and guide them, to comfort and sustain them, to instruct and prepare them, is not on his own behalf, but on behalf of that adorable Bridegroom whose he is, and whom he serves. When he has brought a soul to Him, and hears the Bridegroom's voice of welcome in his heart by faith, his joy is fulfilled.[1]

Accordingly we never find Eliezer magnifying himself, his authority in Abraham's house, nor dignity in his family: but in deep simplicity, merely affirming himself to be Abraham's servant; exalting his master's greatness and honour, and Isaac's glory as Abraham's universal

[1] President Edwards' Works, viii. 42.

heir, "*Unto him hath my master given all that he hath.*"[1] Behold an illustrious exemplar of ministerial faithfulness in duty. We are commanded to come to you, not in our own name, but in the name and on the behalf of God the Father, and his eternal Son. "*We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseeeh you by us.*"[2] "*We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.*" "We must *determine to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*"[4] "*Our speech and our preaching is not to be with enticing words of man's wisdom; but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.*"[5] We must not desire "*to have dominion over your faith, but to be helpers of your joy?*"[6] And surely, it is for this very end that God hath appointed a ministry, not of angels or glorified spirits, who transcend in knowledge, or glow with seraphic love; but of fellow-sinners with yourselves; men of like passions and like temptations. He hath thus ordained, in order that no flesh should glory in his presence, that his

[1] Gen. xxiv. 36. [2] 2 Cor. v. 20. [4] Ibid. iv. 5.
[4] 1 Cor. ii. 2. [5] Ibid. ii. 4. [6] 2 Cor. i. 24.

strength should be made perfect in our weakness; that the excellency of the power should be of God, and not of us; that the earthen vessel should occupy no portion of your regard; or at least should not divide that regard with the treasure which it contains.

(4.) *Prayer is Eliezer's refuge and solace in this important and difficult enterprize.*

Before he opened his commission, he betook himself in supplication to the ever-ready ear of his covenant Jehovah. "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and shew kindness to my master Abraham." And what shall be the hope, and stay, and encouragement of a minister of the Gospel, in his important work? Who is sufficient for the things whereunto he is sent, and for the mighty interests which he is commissioned to advance and secure? The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, has bound upon him the duty of winning souls to Christ. Jesus Himself, the Firstborn and Head of the whole family of God; Jesus, his sole hope of blessedness, and the Church's sole expectancy; Jesus, in all the power of his claim upon the hearts of men, established by the wonders of atoning love, hath

committed this stewardship into his hands. His Gospel must be unto God a sweet savour of Himself in them that are saved, and in them that perish. The preacher's own wisdom is perfect folly; his own strength perfect weakness; his own eloquence sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal; his own resources absolute and utter emptiness. Whither then shall he flee? Blessed, now, and eternally blessed, be God for the throne of grace; for the invitations to approach it; and for the new and living way into the holiest by the blood of Jesus! Thither, when uncertain how to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God; thither, when cast down by our conflict with the principalities of sin; thither, when discouraged by a sense of utter inability, of coldness, ignorance, selfishness, and all unfitness, may we at any, and at every moment repair; and find grace to help, strength to restore, comforts to cheer, hopes to animate, Almightiness to uphold. There are the promises of covenant-love to reassure; as the fabled giant gathered strength by contact with his mother earth, when the arm of his antagonist hurled him down upon it. The enemy only succeeded when he held him up in his grasp and would not let him

touch the ground. The great adversary of men's salvation, and, therefore, of Christ's minister, could never succeed against the vigour and life of pastoral love, zeal, and effort, unless he prevailed to hinder the shepherd's access to God in prayer, and thus robbed him of the power of saying, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.*"[1] A prayerless minister, as he can never truly desire, so he can never reasonably hope to win souls to God, and bring the bride, in search of whom he is sent, to Christ.

(5.) *There is a devotedness in the conduct of Eliezer, well befitting the ambassadors of the Saviour, in their all-important charge.* He would not eat, he would not drink, until he had delivered his message. And when it was happily accomplished, he refused to rest in the house of Bethuel, beyond the night which was absolutely necessary for repose after past fatigue, and preparation for the journey yet before him. Herein he hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps. The watchman of souls, the commissioned servant of our Almighty Father, must not hope that his heart is right, that he hath a conscience void of offence, that

[1] Phil. iv. 13.

he is other than a slothful and wicked servant, dishonouring alike his employer and his work, if he is self-indulgent, and a lover of any pleasure more than a lover of the business of God. It must become his great duty to be continually on the watch-tower of observation; testing character, regarding providences, giving himself wholly to the things of everlasting concernment which he hath undertaken; in season and out of season, doing the work of an evangelist, and making full proof of his ministry; taking heed to himself, and to the doctrine, that he may both save himself, and those who hear him. It is his duty to have fellowship of desire with God's anointed Messenger, the Angel of the covenant, when He said, "*My meat and drink is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish his work.*"[1] O for a conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ; a heart enlightened by his spirit; a soul constrained by his love, in every servant of the Most High God! Thus gifted, he would consider the end of his ministry towards the children of God, towards the spouse and body of Christ; and so he would never cease his labour, his care and diligence, until he

[1] John iv. 34.

had done all that in him lay, according to his bounden duty, to bring all such as should be committed to his charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left, either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life.[1] "*It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.*"[2] Diligence in duty is an especial part of that fidelity. "*Necessity is laid upon us, yea woe unto us if we preach not the Gospel.*"[3] Woe unto us, if the toys and trifles of worldly allurement turn our thoughts from this great work; or, if carnal pursuits, pleasures, studies, occupy our minds and our moments, while the glory of the Saviour committed to our trust, and the everlasting interest of men's souls, to be made good only as they are brought in faith to the Lamb of God, are overlooked and neglected.

(6.) *Abraham's steward took jewels and gifts of his master's goods, and put them upon Rebekah; and gave of them to her kindred, and spake of all the glory of his master's son.* He so prevailed, that the damsel was given into his hand; and her own heart yearned to

[1] Form and Manner of Ordaining of Priests.
[2] 1 Cor. iv. 2. [3] Ibid. ix. 16.

accompany him back again to Canaan. He said, "I am Abraham's servant; and the Lord hath blessed my master greatly, and he is become great; and He hath given him flocks and herds, and silver, and gold, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and camels, and asses." But how is Isaac, for whom Eliezer pleads, concerned in this statement of Abraham's wealth? Most intimately. "Sarah, my master's wife bare a son to my master, when she was old; and unto him hath he given all that he hath." Here was the honest lure, wherewith Rebekah must be won. And are not the goods of the universal Father, as it were put into the hands of his servants: and should they not take of them, and place them before the eyes of your faith, having drawn them from the treasury of the word of God? Should they not point out to you the preciousness of that "*kingdom of God, which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost?*[1]" Is it not their great privilege to tell you, that God the Father hath committed all things into the hands of his only-begotten Son; to testify that there is no want which the soul can feel, no good to

[1] Rom. xiv. 17.

which it can aspire, no hope which it can entertain, no blessedness which it can possess, no pardon by which it can be restored to God's favour, no righteousness in which it can claim his love, no adoption in which it can be instated, no grace which it can possess, no glory which it can attain, that is not treasured up in Him? "*It hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.*"[1] Yes, there are unsearchable riches in Christ. We can only exhibit minute and scanty portions of them, dimly seen with our eyes, and imperfectly gathered with our hands: but what we can shew, and what we are enabled to describe, must not be hidden. "*Ye shall tell my father,*" said Joseph, "*of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen, and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. And ye shall say, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt, come down unto me, tarry not.*"[2] Our errand to you, on the part of our divine Sender, is of the same gracious import.

We can exhibit indeed only, as I said, a minute fraction of our Redeemer's wealth, and

[1] Coloss. i. 19. [2] Gen. xlv. 9.

of that glorious kingdom, whereof God hath made Him the supreme Administrator; even as the spies could only bring a few of the figs and pomegranates, and a cluster of the grapes of Canaan, to tell what lay beyond Jordan, awaiting the coming and possession of the destined host. Here is the high privilege, whereunto the steward over the house of God is called. He must dwell, (and it should be his soul's joy so to dwell,) upon the treasures which God hath made over to his Son. He must allure the hearts of those unto whom the embassy is made, with a description of his beauty, his goodness, and the blessedness of those who dwell in his house, are admitted to his affection, enfolded within his heart, and honoured with the tokens of his love. Listen to the message: and when you are brought into the tent of Isaac, you shall know with her who came to see the glory of Solomon, that the half was not told you.

But the time already occupied warns me to consider,

II. THE DUTY OF THOSE UNTO WHOM THE MINISTERS OF GOD ARE SENT.

(1.) *If a wife could not be found willing to forsake her kindred, her country, and all that*

had been dear in the land of her birth, the servant was to be freed from his oath. Isaac was not to leave Canaan; and a wife must be sought for him elsewhere. Even thus it must be with the spiritual Bride of Jesus Christ. He will give you no authority to hope, nor us permission to declare, that He will come and join you in marriage with Himself, and dwell with you in the land of nature and of sin. You cannot be engrafted upon Him, without being separated, and that for ever, from your original stock. You must be dead to the law, that you may be married to another, even to Christ; and so bring forth fruit unto God. For this cause, shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh. The mystery of which the Apostle speaks, is the gracious and mystical union between Christ and his Church. "*Hearken, O daughter, and consider; incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty, for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him.*" [1]

Abraham did not more peremptorily forsake

[1] Psalm xlv. 2.

Ur of the Chaldees, and all that had wound itself around the affections of his heart for three score and fifteen years, at the bidding of Jehovah, that he might inherit the promise, than the Christian who aspires to union with the Saviour, and who would be made partaker of his dignity, and wealth, and glory, must quit the world, and go to Him, and live with Him by holy communion in heaven, where He sitteth at the right hand of God. "*No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other: ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*"[1] We ask, will you go with us, when we have told our message and tried to shew you of our master's greatness? If you are prepared to be his Bride; if your souls are athirst for the living God; if you faint with holy eagerness to appear in the presence of God, you will count all things but loss that you may win Christ. And it will be your heart's strong outpouring in prayer that all other affections may be absorbed in the desire of seeking, finding, and possessing Him. "*Draw me, and we will run after Thee.*"[2]

[1] Matt. vi. 24. [2] Cant. i. 4.

"*Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee.*"[1] If you will not accompany us to the waiting Bridegroom, and to the land of promise, we shall be free from the vow wherewith our consciences are bound, and we can only mourn over your delusion.

Advise then, and see what answer we shall return to Him who sent us. Will you receive our message; will you credit our embassy; will you allow us to conduct you into the glorious presence of the Bridegroom; to the consummate joys of your marriage with the Lamb of God? Will you permit us to espouse you in the name, and present you to the love of Christ? He will not be satisfied with a divided heart. "*You must lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset you; and look unto Jesus,*"[2] as repaying the sacrifice a thousand fold. You can have no higher interest; for you will be complete in Him. You can have no greater happiness; for bridegroom never rejoiced over bride, as the Lord your God will rejoice over you. You can have no duty more pressing; for "*ye are not your own*

[1] Psalm lxxiii. 25.

[2] Heb. xii.. 2.

but bought with a price, and should therefore glorify God in your bodies, and in your spirits which are his." [1]

(2.) *In those early and simple ages of the world, the husband received no portion with his wife. He purchased her with his own wealth, or bought her to be his possession, by the labour and toil of years. He invested her with all that he had; and to his bounty was she indebted for every comfort.* The very ornaments and bracelets wherewith Rebekah was adorned, were part of Isaac's inheritance, and the offerings of his bounty. And wherewithal shall the soul, which ministerial zeal and love are blessed to join in one with Christ be decked, when it comes into his presence? Even with the gifts, graces, and spiritual bestowments of his own free and liberal love. The messengers of the Church are only the instruments of clothing her in wedding robes, "*in that clean linen, pure and white, which is the righteousness of the saints.*" The Church is purchased from her lost and ruined state by no corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. "*Thy beauty was perfect*

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

through my comeliness, which I put upon thee, saith the Lord God." "The Saviour is made of God unto every one that believeth, *wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.*"[1] Will you then go with us, and dwell with Him? Hear his gracious assurance,—"*All that I have is thine.*"[2] Christ descended from his Father's bosom, and contracted his divinity with flesh and blood, and married your nature, that you might become his Bride, to be cleansed with his blood, to have his Holy Spirit for a dowry, and his kingdom of eternal happiness for a jointure. "*All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's:*"[3] "*And eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.*"[4]

Nothing is said of Rebekah's portion. She had little probably beside herself; and Isaac sought no more. And to every individual, whose love, by us, the Great Bridegroom of the Church condescends to ask, doth He cry, as

[1] 1 Cor. i. 30.
[2] Luke xv. 31.
[3] 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.
[4] 1 Cor. ii. 9.

Balak to Balaam, "*Am I not able indeed to promote thee to honour?*"[1] "*O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.*"[2] The love of his heart is unfathomable; the treasure house of his power to bless, here and hereafter, inexhaustible; and the readiness of his bounty is an unsealed overflowing fountain, to supply all the need of his Church.

And shall there be no correspondence between the gratitude felt, and the blessing conferred? Shall there be hesitation on the part of any here, to whom the invitation of mercy comes? What shall be the answer? "*Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*"[3]

(3.) *When Rebekah had journied onwards, until she drew near to the dwelling of Isaac, it appeared that he was in the way to meet her.* She no sooner learned that he was her lord with whom she was to live and die, than she lighted from her camel, and took her veil, and covered herself, in token of lowly and reverential affection. And it is exactly such a disposition of humility, such an abasement of soul,

[1] Num. xxii. 37. [2] Psalm xxxiv. 8. [3] John vi. 68.

that becomes the new believer, when brought near to Christ, and first admitted, as it were, to personal fellowship with Him, as the Lord and Disposer of body and spirit to his own use and service. "*I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; therefore I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes.*"[1] It must have been a most welcome consummation to Eliezer, when he saw Rebekah alight from her camel and do this reverence to Isaac, as a pledge of her future obedience and submission. And glad and grateful should it make the heart of a steward of God, when the Bride, whom he hath brought to Christ, feels deep self-abasement, in a view of his surpassing glory; compares his condescending love with her own unworthiness; and cries "*Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?*"[2] "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*"[3] "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of God.*"[4]

(4.) *We cannot doubt that Isaac's heart had*

[1] Job xlii. 5.
[2] Psalm viii. 4.
[3] Psalm li. 17.
[4] Matt. v. 3.

gone with Eliezer, and yearned for his coming back again with a companion for his tent, and a wife for his bosom. That solicitude seems to be implied in his going forth to meditate in the field at even tide—to ponder the probabilities of his servant's success—to pray for a blessing upon his journey—and perhaps in faith, to receive that blessing from his hands. And sure we are that our Lord and Master hath an interest more tender than human imagination can realize, in the success of our embassage. He longs to see us bring within his home of salvation those who are the travail of his soul, and over whom He may rejoice with infinite tenderness, while they rejoice in Him with a joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Every restored spirit, every new member added to his Church, is a gem in the diadem of his mediatorial glory: and his heart expands with delight the most pure and disinterested. We are sent not forth by One who cares nothing for the issue of our errand, and cares not whether we return full or empty handed: but by one who tells us in his blessed word—and if we have ourselves found Him precious, who tells us by some happy experience, how welcome you will be to Him, and how tenderly He will embrace

you within the arms of an everlasting affection. Should not a persuasion so endearing, quicken your zeal, animate your love, prompt your decision, and put wings upon your desire to be joined to the Lord in one spirit, and to be his for ever?

(5.) *Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother's tent, and took her, and she became his wife, and he loved her. He was comforted after his mother's death,* and she was the solace of his life.[1] If the parallel hath been hitherto complete, it will not fail at last. The happiness of communion between Isaac and Rebekah is,—compared to that which springs from the holy fellowship between the Saviour and those who walk with Him in the light and bliss of salvation,—as the earliest gleam of twilight, to the brightness of the noontide sun. As the bridegroom, O believer, rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. When Adam spake of Eve there was much meaning in the mode of his expression—"The woman whom Thou gavest to be *with me*," and not merely whom Thou gavest *unto me*. She was not only a *possession*, but a *companion*. Such is the rela-

[1] Gen. xxiv. 67.

tion, and such the fellowship which the Redeemer would have to exist between Himself, and every member of his Church. He loved the Church, and gave Himself for it: and He delights to commune with the Church, in the fulness of that love which prompted Him to consummate the mighty sacrifice of Himself for its salvation. "*Henceforth I call you not servants; but I have called you friends.*"[1] His affection as far surpasses that of man for woman, or of woman towards man, as that love which embraceth eternity transcends the regard that may be contained within the limits of time, and smitten with the stroke of death. The espousal once made, is for ever; and the marriage shall be proclaimed with all the solemnities of an eternal decision. He will rest in his love incapable of change: and the object of his affection shall be filled with all the fulness of God. If therefore any of you can say, "*My Beloved is mine, and I am his,*"[1] what, let me ask, should be the chastity of your heart, and what the unswerving fidelity of your affection? Surely your adorable Bridegroom should be to you, as the chiefest among ten thousands, and

[1] John xv. 15. [2] Cant. ii. 16.

altogether lovely. Surely every throb of your hearts should be in unison with his own declaration, "*Thou shalt not be for another man, so will I also be for thee.*"[1]

And now, "*If ye will deal kindly and truly with my Master, tell me; and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.*" Will ye betroth yourselves to the Son of God, on whose behalf I come; or must I await, in God's good time, others, who will hear the message, and allow me to bring them unto the Saviour's home and heart, to be numbered among his saints for glory everlasting? The servant told Isaac all things that he had done; but he brought Rebekah, as the best evidence of success in his mission. O thou Eternal God, on whose errand of life we come to this family, beseeching them in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to Thee, and united to Him, grant us the same happy results in bringing them effectually to Thee; that when we shall appear in the presence of Christ, many who are now our hope may be our crown of rejoicing!

[1] Hosea iii. 3. Gen. xxiv. 49.

SERMON XL.

ABRAHAM'S SECOND MARRIAGE, AND DEATH.

GENESIS XXV. 8.

THEN ABRAHAM GAVE UP THE GHOST, AND DIED IN A GOOD OLD AGE, AN OLD MAN, AND FULL OF YEARS, AND WAS GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE.

SEPARATION from a companion, by whose conversation we have been instructed, and to whose kindness we have been indebted, does not take place without a sense of privation and regret. It would be little creditable to our state of mind, if the case were otherwise. The feeling of painfulness is increased, in proportion as the matter discussed has been interesting, and the communion itself endearing. On this principle I cannot contemplate without some feeling of sorrow, the necessity of closing this history of the life of Abraham. The subject, deeply momentous in itself, has become in a measure familiar to me by long, though interrupted

intercourse; and I trust that in the course of my fellowship with it, some better acquaintance with the mind of God has been vouchsafed to me. More spiritual improvement would assuredly have been derived to my own heart, in a deeper knowledge of divine dealing, a greater sense of divine love, and a better appreciation of faith, as the shield of the believer's left hand, while his right holds the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, if the matter had been more powerfully, because more prayerfully applied to my own conscience. How it has fared in this all-important regard with you, can be known only to Him, whose prerogative it is to search the heart, and to yourselves. 'If however,' (to apply the language of Bishop Horne, concerning a work of far different pretensions,) 'I could flatter myself that any one had taken half the pleasure in hearing the life of Abraham, that I have taken in writing it, I should not fear the loss of my labour. The hours passed in these meditations, passed very pleasantly; they are gone, but have left a relish and a fragrance upon the mind, and the remembrance of them is sweet.' The subject will reach its close at the end of the present discourse. I commend it, under a deep sense of

its imperfections, (which no one knows more painfully, nor deplores more truly than myself,) to the gracious acceptance of God, through the all-prevailing merit of the great Intercessor. But it is a minister's deep and precious consolation, in the saddening persuasion of inability and unworthiness, to know that a man is accepted according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not. It well becomes him therefore to learn, that he hath in the Atonement of the cross, a blessed hope that "the good Lord will pardon every one that prepareth his heart to glorify God, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary."

In terminating this "strange eventful history," which stands among all others in the experience of mankind, like a lofty mountain gilded and glowing with sunshine, while the lower region is shrouded in mist and gloom, the word of God describes,

I. Abraham's marriage with Keturah.

Sarah, the wife of his heart, the companion of his earlier, the solace of his later life, the mother of his only child according to the promise of Jehovah, and the type of Christ's Church, enjoying the spiritual freedom of his

salvation, had now been dead seven years. The patriarch himself was more than a hundred and forty years old. All the emotions of worldly love might well be imagined to have been buried in the grave of Sarah; and his hourly thoughts to have been fixed upon the invisible realities and glories of that state where they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Upon what principle then may we account for this act of Abraham's life? Must we diminish our deep and fitting veneration for the friend of God, in these later moments of his pilgrimage, when the eye of his faith, and the aspirations of his heart, should be especially directed towards "*the city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.*"

It has frequently been supposed that Moses, here, as in some other places,[1] has related this transaction out of the proper order of time: and that Keturah, who is referred to in the sixth verse, not as his wife, but as his concubine, must have been united to him during the life time of Sarah. It is asserted, that he who rested upon divine promise that he should

[1] The death of Ishmael is recorded in ver. 17, yet he lived until Jacob and Esau were sixty-three years old; and Abraham himself lived until they were fifteen years of age.

have a son, utterly opposed, as the prospect was to sense and nature, considering not his own body now dead, when he was a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb, would have put aside all thoughts of marriage more than forty years afterwards. It is also said, that when Eliezer made the marriage between Rebekah and his master's son, it would have been unnecessary to declare, that Abraham had given his whole substance to Isaac, if he had no more children than Ishmael, who had been sent forth from his house long before. It is therefore alleged, that Abraham took Keturah for his concubine about twenty years after his marriage with Sarah, and long before she gave Hagar into his bosom, in despair of being herself the happy mother of the promised seed. Were this indeed the case, we should have no difficulty in accounting for the number of his descendants, in virtue of this connexion.

But is it necessary to have recourse to this supposition? Does it in fact harmonize with the recorded conduct of Abraham towards Sarah? He took not Hagar as a partner of his bed, until Sarah pressed him so to do, on her own behalf. No word is mentioned of

Sarah's jealousy against Keturah, which could hardly have failed to be excited in such a case; and to have been given as a reason why she should wish to have a son from her own handmaiden, Hagar. The conduct of Abraham towards his wife, is marked by an affectionate tenderness, which bears with her barrenness in absolute silence; because it is the tenderness of faith, resting upon and realizing the fulfilment of a promise from the God of truth,—a tenderness, with which his supposed early relation to Keturah, would appear in no small degree inconsistent. Still less probable does it seem, that he would grieve the heart of his wife by such a measure, after the birth of Ishmael, concerning whom he cried, "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" and especially after the birth of Isaac; when he saw the sorrow and anger which she had felt in consequence of the persecution endured by her son.

We may therefore well believe, that Abraham, having mourned for his wife three years, and seen Isaac united to Rebekah, took to wife Keturah, who was probably the principal of his female servants, as Eliezer of Damascus was his steward. The same Almightiness of God, which by miracle gave him Isaac at a hundred

years old, was surely equally able to extend that miracle to his servant, so long beyond the period at which Isaac had been received from the dead in a figure. "*With God all things are possible.*"[1] "*Is any thing too hard for the Lord?*"[2] But must we imagine, that in the extraordinary strength of faith, whereby he has been hitherto marked out and distinguished from every other child of Adam, Abraham has now become weak like another man? Hath he lost this might of faith in the lap of Keturah, as Samson in after-days lost his strength of nature in the lap of Delilah? Must we believe, that while the promise of Isaac was pending, and while Abraham was employed in promoting that great object, the cloud of glory accompanies all his movements; but this being accomplished, and his mind diverted to lower pursuits, and a passion of dotage, the cloud hath departed, and he must walk the remainder of his journey in a manner without it?[3] May we not rather believe, that under the direction of his covenant and constant God, and in order that his faith might be rewarded on this side the world of cloudless vision by a sight of that numerous

[1] Matt. xix. 26. [2] Gen. xviii. 14.
[3] Fuller on Genesis i. 296.

posterity which God had promised him,[1] he took to wife Keturah; and was permitted to behold the divine engagement in ample process of fulfilment? Such a judgment is at least that of charity, and assuredly not that of improbability, when the whole of God's wondrous dealing with Abraham is taken into the account. It arises from the most simple view of the sacred historian's narrative; and in our expositions of Scripture, where a literal construction or meaning will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst.[2]

Keturah, it is true, both in this chapter, and 1 Chron. i. *32, 33,* is called the concubine of Abraham, but not in the same sense as Hagar. She was not indeed married with the same ceremonial and solemnity as Sarah, nor could her children be admitted as heirs with Isaac. But she was still the patriarch's lawful wife. She was no bondwoman, like Hagar to Sarah; but had the rule over his house, and filled the place of Sarah when she slept in the grave of Mamre. The knowledge and fear of the one true Jehovah, was in some degree preserved among their descendants. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses

[1] Gen. xviii. 5, 6.

[2] Hooker, Book V. Sect. 59.

sprung from Midian; and that saint, who possessed his soul in patience amidst all his sorrows, because he knew that his Redeemer lived, and that in his flesh he should see God, had in all probability the same illustrious origin.

II. ABRAHAM'S DISPOSAL OF HIS ESTATE claims our next consideration.

(1.) *He gave all that he had to Isaac.* ver. 5. The Most High had Himself declared, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And the patriarch had been consoled under the removal of Ishmael from all portion in the inheritance, by the assurance that of him, although the son of the bondwoman, he would make a nation, because he was Abraham's seed. Upon this authority he had acted; and Eliezer, on his behalf, declared to the kindred of Rebekah, that he had given unto Isaac all that he had. His flocks and herds, his silver and gold, his men servants, and maid servants, his camels and asses, his reversionary interest in the land of Canaan, when the hour for consummating the cause and wrath of God against its people should strike,—all were secured to the son of his especial love, and of his dearest hopes. Justice to Rebekah, who married Isaac on that supposition, required

that thus it should be; and any other appropriation of his wealth after that engagement would have been a breach of faith, which the friend of God would never have committed. In fact, it rested not with Abraham to divide what his Almighty Benefactor had given him: the sentence of God Himself, having, as I said, already made the appropriation, in a manner the most solemn and irrevocable.

(2.) But, as the Saviour cried to Nathanael, "*Because I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these;*"[1] so, notwithstanding we are led to consider Isaac as one much distinguished by his ample inheritance of earthly good, *our view of his happiness will be vastly extended, our sense of his privileges prodigiously enlarged, as we contemplate that glorious and gracious horizon of spiritual blessing, which the only worthy interpretation of God's word draws aside the veil to exhibit.* The promise can only have its accomplishment in a bestowment of mercies, secured to Isaac by that everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, which had been made in the absolute freeness of divine love

[1] John i. 50.

with his father Abraham. The body of Isaac's inheritance was unquestionably of a temporal nature. But the soul of its blessedness was most assuredly of a spiritual character. Whatever Abraham had reared or planted, whatever he had bought with money, whatever he had gained by increase,—the land of Canaan itself, to which a covenant claim had been attached, were mere emblems, signs, and shadows of mercies immeasurably greater. The entail of the covenant involved an unalienable interest in the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory, not less than it included the descent of God manifest in the flesh from his loins, as a natural seed and posterity. Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey, the land whose stones were iron, and out of whose hills their possessor might dig brass; Canaan itself, with all its fruitfulness and beauty, was only a feeble type of the better, that is the heavenly country, which had been secured to Isaac, *the "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."* [1] *"The rest, in short, that remaineth for the people of God."* [2]

[1] 1 Pet. i. 4. [2] Heb. iv. 9.

(3.) And in this rich inheritance, what is Isaac himself, *but a representative, accommodated by divine condescension to our apprehension, of Him whom the Father hath appointed Heir of all things.*[1] To that Son the Everlasting Father hath given "*the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.*"[2] To that Son He hath given all power in heaven and earth. That son He hath loved, and put all things into his hand. To that son He "*hath given a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

(4.) But what advantage, it may be asked, *do the spiritual kindred of Isaac derive from this mysterious, but assuredly real spiritual connexion between him and the Saviour of all?* The key to unlock this door of blessed hope is in the hand of faith. The eye to view these treasure-chambers of mercy, is the eye of faith. The power of appropriating their stores of spiritual and gracious wealth, is the power of faith. The

[1] Heb. i. 2. [2] Ps. ii. 8.

ear which receives the assurance of a covenant right to possess them, is the ear of faith. Have you the hand, have you the eye, have you the power, have you the ear of this faith, the gift of God unto its possessor's salvation? Then all things are yours. O it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, however frequently it may have been repeated, that "*if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise!*"[1] "*If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.*"[2] It is an assurance, to sound with the sweetness of God's own truth and God's own love, that the humblest believer hath his part and portion in the unsearchable riches of Christ; that the promise is sure as eternal faithfulness can make it, since its substance and security is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. It is a mine wherein the gold is without alloy,—a storehouse where all is substance, and nothing shadow, as the best of earthly comforts are, themselves alone considered. The dearest earthly good, rather stimulates an appetite, than satisfies it; rather provokes, than quenches the thirst of desire; rather expresses indigence in ceaseless motion, than

[1] Gal. iii. 29. [2] Rom. viii. 17.

complacency in perfect rest. If the eye of man were searching as the sun, from the light of which nothing is hid, yet amidst all the innumerable objects which it might behold, there is not one that can fill and satisfy the ever-craving soul of man. Only the spiritual mercies of the covenant, the exceeding great and precious promises, which in Christ Jesus are yea and amen to the glory and praise of God, having Himself for their exhaustless substance, can fill the believer with all the fulness of God. But with that fulness, the Christian's expectancy, however amply faith may enlarge it, shall overflow. The spring comes forth from the sanctuary; it swells out from the altar of the Redeemer's sacrifice. And when poured by the Holy Ghost through faith into the soul, will roll onwards, enlarging and deepening, refreshing and consoling, sanctifying and strengthening, fertilizing and purifying the believer, not only through the time-state of the world of grace, but through the state eternal of the world of glory.

(5.) *To Ishmael and the other sons of his concubine, Abraham gave gifts; but he sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, into the east country.* The Most

High was not unmindful of his promise; nor did He permit Abraham to leave his children destitute. They had a claim upon his affection, which might not be neglected without sin. To that claim he responded, as far as God permitted; and he did well; for "*if any man provide not for his own, and especially for them of his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*" And here I may be allowed a moment to observe, that Abraham's example teaches every man to make a settlement of his worldly concerns, while death may yet be distant; and that so wisely, as to cut off if possible the causes of litigation and disunion from his family. But in Isaac's heritage they had no part. They were not indeed excluded from salvation. Nor have we any reason to imagine that Ishmael went forth from Abraham's tent, as Cain from the presence of the Lord, to live and die a despairing infidel, as indeed he had once been an ungodly persecutor: for Ishmael attends with Isaac to pay the last duties to his parent. But the son of the bondwoman was not to be heir with the son of the free woman. The spiritual heritage was especially made over to Isaac; and we have no certainty that Ishmael had any thing beyond his mere portion

of providential and perishable gifts. And whereunto shall our allotment of present bounties and possessions tend, if it be not accompanied and sanctified by an interest in the covenant of salvation? We shall but possess the shadow, instead of the reality of good. We may fix our hearts upon it, as though it were substantial. But if the things of this life, however desirable and desired, are our only portion —if we have none for the soul's present resting place, as well as for eternity, in the Person and salvation of the Son of God, mind has no power to imagine, language has no faculty to describe the misery and destitution of our state. Thus bereft of all by the hand of death, and cut off from the Christian's cause of joy unspeakable and full of glory by unbelief, we shall each cry with Micah when the Danites robbed him of his idols, "*Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and what have I more?*"[1] But I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak.

The course of this history now carries us to consider, finally,

[1] Judges xviii. 24.

III. The Death of Abraham.

In the removal of an aged believer from the visible into the invisible world, there is a mixture of joy and sadness, strongly contrasting, yet beautifully harmonizing with each other, and with the feelings of fellow Christians; like the rainbow upon the cloud at the subsiding deluge. The providence is dark and painful in itself; but the gracious assurances are bright and beautiful, in the radiance of scriptural truth and promise. And such must have been the mingled feelings of those who stood around the bed of dying Abraham.

One hundred years had passed away since he left Ur of the Chaldees, and came at God's bidding to dwell in Canaan—a stranger and a pilgrim in the land. He had many opportunities of returning; but faith persevered, fought, vanquished, and was now about to triumph. He had desired a better country, that is a heavenly; and was now just about to find it in its intermediate joy and happiness.

(1.) *These are the days which Abraham lived, a hundred and three score and fifteen years.* He died the youngest of all the patriarchs; and yet in a good old age, a hoary age, an old man, according to the promise of his covenant God

(Gen. xv. 15.) "*Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.*" Of all, whose passage from mortality to immortality is mentioned in Scripture, this promise is given only to Gideon, (Judges viii. 32.) and David, (1 Chron. xxix. 38.) Man's age is comparative; and life's true length,—its duration, with reference to its everlasting end, is not measured by lapse of years, but by growth in grace, and in meetness for the inheritance of the saints of light. An aged disciple of Christ Jesus may answer the cry, "*Surely I come quickly,*" by saying, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;*" and drop before the sickle, like a shock of corn, ripe in its season. Another happy member of his body mystical may be summoned in the may-time and morning of youth, before he hath borne the burden and heat of the day, or learned how sweetly and how mightily the comforts of God refresh the soul in its spiritual work and conflict. What then? Shall we say that he has become the tenant of an untimely grave? Shall we not rather hear the attestation which even his young experience will make to the fidelity of God? "*I have fought a good*

fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me in that day."[1] "*My flesh and my heart fail: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*"[2]

(2.) *Abraham died full of years, having lived to do the will, and glorify the name of Jehovah.* He served his generation by the will of God: and then what had he to do—what else hath any other partaker of like precious faith to do, except to fall on sleep, and be laid to his fathers, and see corruption? In the original it is merely stated that he died *full*—the words (of years) are supplied by our translators. And what may we argue concerning this probably studied omission of the Holy Spirit? Surely that he not merely submitted to an invincible necessity, anticipating the proud, stern acquiescence of the stoic school; but retired from life, as a guest who had moderately partaken of a banquet, and contentedly made way for others at the table where himself had gratefully feasted?[3] His faith had lived on Christ: and therefore he was willing to be dissolved, and to

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 7. [2] Psalm lxxiii. 26.

[3] Vide Lucret. iii. 947. Horat. Sat. Lib. I. Sat. I. 117.

be with Him, in that glory which He hath enjoyed as the Uncreated Word of the Father, whom yet he knew as the Messiah, in whom himself and all the nations of the earth should have their blessing. That believer hath attained to a happy and distinguished standing in the school of his Redeemer's grace: who hath power to welcome Him in a dying hour; who thinks that he has lived long enough, when Jesus so thinks; and who springs forward to Him with the cheerful cry, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*"[1] Alas! how many loathe life, and yet are insatiable for its continuance! Would you escape this tremendous bondage? Let it be Christ to you to live, and then it will be gain to die; and of that gain you will probably have a foretaste, in the last conflict with the last enemy.

(3.) *We have no proof that Abraham died without pain.* We know not, more than in the case of Sarah, whether his last moments were gladdened by any especial outpouring of joy upon his soul, in sensible communion with God; whether he possessed simply the calmness of hope, or the triumph of a full assurance of

[1] Rev. xxii. 20.

faith? But, as the Holy Ghost hath testified concerning him that he died in *faith*, we may not doubt that he died in *peace*, according to the promise of his God: and we need to know nothing more. It is of small comparative moment, whether the lamp of one dying saint's experience burn a little more, or less brightly, than that of others who have a similar portion in the common salvation. We may be abundantly satisfied that the Sun of Righteousness is just about to arise upon them all without a cloud, and fill them with his light for ever. Abraham knew that if his earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, he should have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And on this side the opened door of that glorious habitation, there is little more to enjoy, than such knowledge conveys. Can we say, in faith and love, as we regard Christ in the promises: "*Into thy hands, I commit my spirit; for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord Thou God of truth?*" Then He will not only receive that which we thus commit to Him; but give us some good persuasion, that He *hath* received it, and will keep it unto the great day of his appearing.

(4.) *It is witnessed of Abraham that he died*

in faith, not having received the promises; but having seen them afar off, and been persuaded of them, and embraced them.[1] That mighty grace, placing the everlasting arms of divine fidelity and love beneath him, upheld him during a century of wanderings and waitings, of hope deferred, and of opposition from without. But "*he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.*"[2] He was faithful unto death; and God all-sufficient, before whom he walked in perfectness, gave him a crown of life. If this illustrious man embraced the promises beheld so darkly and so distantly, amidst the clouds and shadows of the patriarchal economy, what ought to be the amount, and what the fervour of Christian faith, under the new Testament of the grace of God! If, with their imperfect revelation, the early saints endured the trials, and overcame the temptations of the world, how stable should be the believer's walk, how strong his hands to war, and his fingers to fight the spiritual battle, when the Head and Captain of his salvation hath now been exhibited triumphing in his behalf! But what is the fact? Shall we say that the Christian's

[1] Psalm xxxi. 5. [2] Heb. xl. 27.

walk is worthy of his privilege? Must we not rather confess the contrary? If that be the truest faith which is most remote from carnal sense, and natural evidence, then the ancient believers, without the demonstrations of fact and fulfilment which we enjoy, gave more implicit credit to the truth of God, than their followers now exhibit. Is holiness a separation from all things that can defile either the body or the soul, and a zealous consistency in all the exercises of holiness? Then surely it is not without good reason, that we are commanded to be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promise. Alas, the question may well be put, "What do we more than others?" But who shall give the answer? Where are the saints to be found walking worthy of God who hath called them to his kingdom and glory. "*Unto thee, O God, belongeth righteousness, but unto us confusion of faces.*" [1]

(8.) *Abraham was gathered to his people, and buried with Sarah in the cave of Machpelah.* They were lovely in their lives, and after death they were not divided. He had already taken livery of Canaan as his inheritance, by

[1] Dan. ix. 7.

laying Sarah's bones within its borders. He will now again take seisin of the country, by depositing his own bones to moulder there, and by bequeathing his dust to mingle with the dust of the promised land; as well as with that of his beloved wife, "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal hope, through our Lord Jesus Christ; *who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.*"[1] That Abraham had a hope full of immortality, we cannot doubt. Had it never before been enkindled in his bosom, it must have poured its light and glory upon his heart, in that wondrous transaction upon Mount Moriah, when he offered up Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead; and in the same moment saw the day of the Son of Man. In fact, the great mystery of redemption from sin through the Atonement, involves, by an absolute necessity, the knowledge and persuasion of a future everlasting state; and is wholly unintelligible upon any other supposition. When we read therefore, that Abraham *was gathered to his*

[1] Phil. iii. 21.

people, we know assuredly that the sacred penman speaks not primarily of his body: as its dust was only gathered to the dust of Sarah. The Holy Ghost carries us in vision with him into the eternal state,—the separate condition of disembodied and blessed souls,—the spirits of just men made perfect. When long afterwards, the Angel Jehovah spake unto Moses at the bush, and said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," He meant, as Himself the Amen, the faithful and true Witness afterwards declared, that He was not the God of the dead, but of the living: and that Abraham therefore lived to Him. When the great Prophet of the Church represented Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, He unquestionably attested his blessedness in the invisible world. A grave in Canaan was not therefore, all that God bestowed upon Abraham, when the long and weary pilgrimage of life was passed. His relation to God was as entire, three centuries after his body was mingled with the clods of the valley, as when he entertained angels at Mamre, or sacrificed Isaac in his holy purpose upon Mount Moriah; and so it is at this day. In that state he now rests, and awaits the resurrection of the just.

In that state rest the spirits of all who have departed in the true faith and fear of God's holy name. In that state may we be found, if we fall asleep before the coming of our Lord! And in that great day of his appearing, may our souls and bodies, glorified and sinless, be united to partake the wonders of the resurrection of the just, to live with God, all and in all for ever!

But death will gather us *to our people*. If our companions have been they who loved and trusted in the Saviour—if our communion hath been with the saints—if our fellowship hath been with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, in the light and liberty of holiness, then shall we be ever with them and with the Lord. If our conversation hath been with the sinner, the unbeliever, the God of this world—such companionship forming the dark tenor of our lives, and the dismal character of their end, so will be the society of the world everlasting. "Judge therefore yourselves, dear brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord."

IV. I may add—and the subject would be incomplete without such a remark, that A BELIEVER IN GOD MAY EXPECT HIS OWN COVENANT REDEEMER AND FATHER TO BE

THE PORTION OF HIS CHILDREN. "It came to pass after the death of Abraham that God blessed his son Isaac." A rich and ample volume of mercy is included within this little sentence. Page after page of it was unfolded and imparted to this simple and humble man of God, every day, and every hour of his future life. And page after page shall be realized to him throughout eternity. The promise was abundantly fulfilled, which the fidelity of Jehovah had long before spoken to his father—"*I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed.*" [1] Quiet, inoffensive, chaste, and retired, this eminent man of God dwelt by the well Lahai-roi—the well of God who liveth and seeth his people: and there he had consoling visions of the Most High, to establish his faith. Twenty years did he wait in that faith and patience, before the Lord opened the womb of Rebekah, and she became the mother of Esau and Jacob. In all that time he took no concubine to his bed, under a sinful pretence of carnal reasoning, to advance the purpose of Jehovah. "*He staggered not at the promises of God through unbelief: but was strong in faith, giving glory*

[1] Gen. xvii. 7.

to God."[1] He also dwelt as a stranger and a pilgrim in Canaan; and had his conversation in heaven.

The prayer of parental faith hath a mightiness of prevalency with God, to open his heart towards the children of his pleading family; as he first closed and then opened the windows of heaven to the supplications of Elijah. The example of parental holiness, brings with it a blessing upon children, both for this world and for that which is to come. Joseph said to his brethren and children, "*I die, and God will surely visit you.*"[2] Such language may the departing believer adopt concerning those for whom he hath wrestled with God, and use it in the full assurance of faith. Christian parents, use it now; and trust a faithful God for its issue!

And here, to use the exquisite language of Isaac Walton, in his record of our own Hooker's death,—here I draw Abraham's curtain; till with the most glorious company of the Patriarchs and Apostles, the most noble army of Martyrs and Confessors, this most humble holy man shall also awake to receive an eternal tranquil-

[1] Rom. iv. 20. [2] Gen. l. 24.

lity, and with it a greater degree of glory, than that of which common believers shall be made partakers. Have any of your hearts burned within you by the way, as we have unfolded his history? Does it dwell with any sweetness or power upon your minds? Then lift up each his soul to God, and cry in Balaam's words, but in the spirit of one, to whom Christ and holiness, peace and bliss are dear, "*Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!*"[1]

[1] Num. xxiii. 10.

THE END.

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